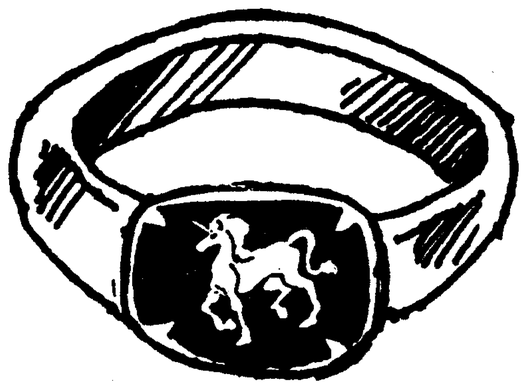
Felicia Meets Wish

-Chad Melville-

Felicia

Melari's Wish



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MU PRESS
5014 Roosevelt Way NE
Seattle, WA 98105

e.vick1@genie.geis.com

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This one is dedicated to all the folks at Rowrbrazzle, *members past and present -- fans and critics all, whose feedback was invaluable.*

And most especially to Marc ("Unca Schirm") Schirmeister, who said, "The theme is dragons..."

Introduction

You don't know how lucky you are to be able to read *Melari's Wish* all at once, instead of over a five-year serialization.

That's how it originally appeared in *Rowrbrazzle*. *'Brazzle* is a combination of a club and a magazine for what were originally called "funny animal fans" when it started in 1984. Members (who have included people like Steve Gallacci, Stan Sakai, Terrie Smith, Jim Groat, Ted Sheppard, Bill Fitts, Paul Kidd, Mike Sagara, Roz Gibson, and Mike Kazaleh) have to write/draw their own pages and send them to the club's editor to be stapled together into the magazine, which is published four times a year.

Chuck Melville had already created his universe before he joined *Rowrbrazzle*. One issue of his own independent comic book, *The Champion of Katara*, had appeared in 1987. None of the fans in *'Brazzle* knew who he was, but the quality of his work was self-evident. Unfortunately, 1987 was at the height of the black-&-white comic-book implosion, and his second issue was never published. But he then read about *'Brazzle* in an issue of *Amazing Heroes*, and he was intrigued enough to join the club.

We hoped that he might print his unpublished second issue of *The Champion of Katara* in *'Brazzle*. Instead, he presented a brand-new story featuring Felicia, a minor character in *Katara* who he explained had gotten more mail than any of the main characters. This story, "Deception", appeared in *'Brazzle* #16, the January 1988 issue. Everybody loved it, but it seemed to be complete by itself. We didn't realize that it was the beginning of a serial that would appear in every issue until *'Brazzle* #36, January 1993, 5 1/4 years later.

In fact, it took about a year before it was clear that Melville was writing a single, continuing adventure rather than a series of short stories. We're still not quite sure how much of *Melari's Wish* was planned from the start, and how much was written on an issue-by-issue basis. *Rowrbrazzle* is a mixture of a literary magazine and a sometimes-rowdy social club, and at first Melville seemed to be more interested in making ingroup *'Brazzle* comments than in telling a real story. "Deception" was serious enough, but the next couple of chapters seemed like independent comedies at the time.

'Brazzle #18, July 1988, was a "Summer swimsuit special" issue, and "Beach of Contract" opened with Felicia at the beach. "Sneaks, Snakes, Snacks" in *'Brazzle* #20 included a group shot of several other *'Brazzle* members' characters in the tavern, and a reference to "brazzleberry cookies".

Even after it was clear that this was a single, continuous story, Melville continued to work in topical themes. *'Brazzle* #22, July 1989, was a "special 20th anniversary of the Lunar landing" issue, and, sure enough, Melville managed to fit a Moon theme into that issue's chapter, "Moon Reaver". *'Brazzle* #23, October 1989, had a Hallowe'en/horror theme, and "Housecall" was where the story suddenly became ominously dramatic. *'Brazzle* #24, January 1990, and #28, January 1991, were theme issues around the Oriental zodiac: the Years of the Horse and Sheep/Goat. Check out Melville's chapters, "Horsing Around" and "Two Ninnies and a Nanny". *'Brazzle* #25, April 1990, centered around a more abstract theme: color. Melville introduced a new character named "Rose" — and he sent in that chapter printed on rose-pink paper! It would be needlessly tedious to list all the references; the point is that *Melari's Wish* looks like it was tightly written from its beginning in 1988, but it contains so many elements that could only have been worked into the story with a mere few months' notice — *how did he do it!?*

But *Melari's Wish* is so much more than five years' worth of *'Brazzle* ingroup references worked into an exciting adventure! It introduces characters whom you will remember and want to see again; especially the enigmatic Lady Felicia cla di Burrows. One reason that *'Brazzle* members did not realize at first that Melville's stories were all connected is that Felicia's nature seemed to change so drastically between one tale and the next. A traitor? A good-natured tourist? A businesswoman with a heart of gold? A deep schemer? You will see that Felicia is all of these, and more. If she is a heroine, she is a deeply flawed one. If she is a villainess, she is an unusually sympathetic one. She is too proud to seek forgiveness, as Arell does, but it is a hard-hearted reader who will not give it to her nonetheless.

So read — enjoy — and wait for the next adventure!

Fred Patten
Official Editor, *Rowrbrazzle*
November 1994

Preface

...So when *Champion of Katara* had bit the dust in the wake of the b&w glut back in '87, and my partners and I sadly dissolved Crack o'Dawn, I found myself wondering which way to go next. The funny-animal thing wasn't working very well, and I was beginning to think I'd have to turn my attentions back to the slightly-less-intriguing world of super-hero art.

Then I found a copy of *Amazing Heroes* 187.

It was a special issue dedicated to anthropomorphics, with a Steve Gallacci portrait of Erma Felna on the cover. And inside was a tiny, little article about some little fanzine called *ROWRBRAZZLE*, written by these two guys, Fred Patten and Edd Vick — whoever *they* were.

It seems that *ROWRBRAZZLE* was a fanzine comprised of all these smaller fanzines — an APA they called it — and they were assembled together and mailed out in one big package. And it was *all* funny animals! And the article had all these pictures by people like Ken Sample and Mike Kazaleh and Mark Wallace and Robert Carspecken and Cathy Hill and Tracy Horton and —

I wasn't alone any more.

I wrote off immediately to the central mailer (that's the editor-guy) and asked to be put on their waiting list. The article said there was a waiting list. So I settled back to wait. This was early November.

A week or so later I received a reply from a Mr. Marc Schirmeister. The card said, "Okay, you're in. The deadline is December 31, the theme is dragons, and the copy count is fifty."

I immediately went into a panic that took me five years to recover from. I had roughly a month left to do something. But what should I do? I hadn't actually seen a copy of *ROWRBRAZZLE*, so I didn't know what was expected of me. Dragons!? I had just finished a seventy-two page story about dragons that wasn't going to be published now, and I was sick of them; but surely I couldn't send *that* in to the APA — it was too *big*!

Finally, an idea came to mind — I could use Felicia in a short story. She had already proved to be popular just through her brief appearance in *Champ*. I could throw in a dragon, and use the opportunity to widen her character a bit. This would stall things a bit until I saw my first issue and got a better idea of what the other members did...

Well, as Fred already told you, the story went on for five years. *I* certainly didn't realize how big it was going to be until I started the third chapter and I began to see some of the high points of the story further on down the road. And all the theme tie-ins? Sleight of hand. In some cases

I guessed ahead of time what they were going to be, and I planned on it. But they sure threw me some curves in there — like the Moon Landing. And *color*!? In a black and white fanzine!? Woof!

Two important things developed from this story. The first was the opportunity to improve my art through experimentation, and by getting gobs of feedback from the many-layered membership of the APA. The other was the number of friendships I have discovered through *ROWRBRAZZLE*. I got a lot of advice, a lot of opinions, a lot of help, and a lot of good-natured ribbing. I also got to know a lot of very good, and very talented people, and I am certainly the better for it. I even got to know those two guys who wrote that article back in *Amazing Heroes*!

For me, the important thing about the story itself is that the rest of the gang seemed to enjoy it, and that was gratifying. Believe me, they're a tough bunch of critics in there. Mike Kazaleh complimenting the timing in one of the chapters meant more than I could ever tell you. Knowing that I had people reading and trying to guess where I was going next made it all worth while; knowing that they enjoyed it brought me enjoyment.

Speaking of those wonderful folks at *ROWRBRAZZLE*, let me say a few words about Mark Wallace. Mark is better known to most fans as the penciler of the late *Equine the Uncivilized*, and to practitioners of the Society for Creative Anachronism as the chronicler of *Warthaven* and *Vixen's Keep*. He is a draftsman, a Peer, a gentleman, and a superb artist. And he was one of the first to give me a warm welcome when I first joined *ROWRBRAZZLE*, by adding Felicia to a group of beach-partiers on the cover to the 18th issue. And, to my surprise, provided the final epilogue to this book.

After reading Felicia's parting remarks in the last chapter — what *I* thought would be the last chapter, Mark immediately sat down and drew out a response and ran it in his submission in the very next mailing. And a fine epilogue it makes, too! Thanks, Mark; I can't find the words to properly express my gratitude. You are indeed a gentleman and a scholar!

Enough talking; you've got one hundred and sixty-odd pages to get through! We had five years, but you've only got an hour! And there'll be a test!! Go and enjoy!

Chuck Melville
Seattle, Washington
December 1994

Chapter 1
DECEPTION

OH, PLEASE, YOUR MAJESTY; IT'S *FELICIA*.. REMEMBER?

AH, WELCOME! WELCOME BACK TO DOGONIA, SORCERESS!

AS YOU WISH, MY DEAR...

IT IS FORTUNATE INDEED THAT YOU CHOSE THIS TIME TO VISIT US, FOR WE ARE IN NEED OF YOUR AID. WE ARE PLAGUED OF LATE BY A DRAGON!

EVEN NOW MY SOLDIERS ARE PREPARING TO HUNT THE MONSTER, BUT I FEAR THAT THIS MAY BE A TASK BEYOND THEIR STRENGTHS!

MMM... I REALLY ONLY STOPPED HERE AS A COURTESY CALL - I HAVE OTHER BUSINESS ELSE-WHERE IN DOGONIA. BUT I SUPPOSE THAT I CAN'T ALLOW A DRAGON AT LARGE IN THE COUNTRYSIDE...

I DON'T WISH TO TIRE MY STEED FURTHER, SO...

GREAT ALN!

I'VE ALWAYS WANTED TO TRY THIS! (GIGGLE)

AMAZING! YOU DO IT WITH SO LITTLE EFFORT!

ASTOUNDING!

TRULY ASTOUNDING! I HAVE NEVER SEEN SUCH MASTERFUL USE OF MAGIC... NOT EVEN BY THE GREAT ALLYOUWISHES HIMSELF!

BUT IT ANNOYS YOU, DOESN'T IT, CAPTAIN BEEFHOUND? WHY IS THAT?

BECAUSE IT SEEMS TO ME TO BE A WASTE OF YOUR POWER... AND IF YOU HAVE THAT MUCH POWER TO WASTE, THEN WE ARE NEEDLESSLY RISKING MY MEN'S LIVES.

SPEAKING OF WASTE, WE'RE WASTING TIME! IF WE COULD GET STARTED?!

AT ONCE, SORCERESS.

SNUFFLER!

SNUFFLER, CAN YOU TRACK A DRAGON?

YOU JOKE, CAP'N?

SOON..

SNIFF!

SNIFF!

THERE!

GET 'IM, MEN!

THERE! I GOT IT, CAP'N!

WOOF! WOOF! WOOF! WOOF! WOOF!

BOW WOW WOW WOW WOW WOW

BOW WOW WOW WOW WOW WOW

BOW WOW WOW WOW WOW WOW

OH, SPARE ME!

ARF!

HE'S HIDING IN THAT COPSE OF TREES!

THERE HE IS!

WE'VE FLUSHED THE RASCAL OUT!

SURROUND HIM, QUICK!

WOOF! WOOF! WOOF! WOOF! WOOF! WOOF!

ARF!

DON'T LET 'IM GET AWAY!

ALL RIGHT... THAT'S QUITE ENOUGH!

WHUMP! WHUMP! WHUMP!

SCREECH!

HMMM... JUST AS I SUSPECTED.

WHAT DO YOU MEAN?

DID YOU EVER KNOW A DRAGON TO FLEE, CAPTAIN? THIS ISN'T A TRUE DRAGON AT ALL!

LOOKS REAL TO ME!

ARF!

MODESKAR OS SHAY YD MOAKAVA THASM!

WHA...?! WHERE'D IT GO?!

NOT AT ALL. IT'S RIGHT HERE.

IT'S ESCAPED!

NOT A DRAGON AT ALL. JUST A SHAPE-CHANGING SNAUK WHO'S A LONG WAY FROM FUNGOR!

IS IT DANGEROUS?

NOT LIKE A DRAGON, NO... BUT IN ITS OWN WAY...

SQUEE**

SPLAT!

NOT ANY MORE.

LATER...

AN EXCELLENT JOB, FELICIA! AND A FORTUNATE THING FOR US THAT WE DID CORNER THE CREATURE AS SOON AS WE DID!

I HAD FEARED A DRAGON LOOSE AMONG US, I CONFESS; WHAT WITH ITS OWN POWERS AND ITS EVIL CUNNING...

WELL, A SNAUK IS A MINOR MONSTER AFTER ALL, YOUR MAJESTY... BUT IT WOULD HAVE SOWN ENOUGH CONFUSION IN ITS WAKE.

FAREWELL, SORCERESS! GOOD FORTUNE!

AND NOW, I MUST CONTINUE ABOUT MY ORIGINAL BUSINESS. *SHOL T ALYA MOLARCUR LARSPAKAL THAS FAHRPLAS!*

THAT NIGHT, MANY MILES FROM THE PALACE...

YOU PERFORM WELL, SORCERESS.

ELSE I COULD NOT BRING YOU THIS!

YOUR ANNUAL SHIPMENT. I HAD TO USE A SMALL PORTION TO ACHIEVE MY DISGUISE; THAT AND... ANOTHER DETAIL.

BUT YOU MAY BE ASSURED THAT THE CHEST DOES INDEED CONTAIN YOUR...

IT SHOULD NEVER HAVE BEEN NECESSARY. YOU WERE CARELESS, ALLOWING YOURSELF TO BE SEEN!

IT COULD NOT BE HELPED.

YOUR BRETHREN WATCH MY LAIR TOO CLOSELY; I HAD TO MEET WITH YOU IN DOGONIA...

GIVE IT TO ME!! QUICKLY!!

MAGIKDUST!

YES. FROM ITS ONLY SOURCE, IN THE BLACK MINES OF FUNGOR!

SMALL WONDER THAT YOUR MAGIC IS MUCH MORE POTENT THAN YOUR FELLOW WIZARDS, WITH THIS POWDER TO AUGMENT YOUR POWERS!

YOU SERVE MY MASTER WELL!

I HAVE ALREADY TOLD YOU BEFORE; WHATEVER OUR ARRANGEMENTS, I SERVE MY OWN NEEDS.

I DO NOT SERVE YOUR MASTER!

OH?

...BUT DON'T YOU?

I'LL TAKE MY LEAVE, NOW. IT'S A LONG FLIGHT BACK TO KATARA...

JUST A MOMENT!

WHAT HAVE YOU DONE WITH THE *REAL* CAPTAIN BEEFHOUND?

WHY... I HAD PUT HIM IN A SAFE PLACE...

...BUT I'M AFRAID THAT HE HAD... AN ACCIDENT!

WHAT?!

HA! HA! HA! HA! HA!

YES... HE WOUND UP GETTING... UNDERFOOT!
HA!
HA!
HA!
HA!
HA!
HA!

Chapter 2
SIGN OF THE THREE CARROTS

THREE CARROTS

WELL! A LEP'KUFFT* INN... IN DOGONIA!

HOW CHARMING! ...AND UNUSUAL!

*LEP'KUFFT: "THE HOMELESS ONES"; RABBITS

HMM. I SEE THE WIZARD'S TOUR BOOK AND GUIDE GAVE IT A TRIPLE-A RATING! BUT... I DON'T KNOW... A LEP'KUFFT INN IN A DOGONIAN TOWN IS JUST ASKING FOR TROUBLE...

I MIGHT BE BETTER OFF PASSING IT BY...

WELCOME, WELCOME, GOOD LADY! PLEASE... REST YOUR STEED AND YOURSELF IN OUR HOME!

NO, THANK YOU, GOOD SIR. I HAVE MUCH FURTHER TO JOURNEY YET...

BUT WE HAVE FRESH FISH... GOOD WINE... A FINE MUSICIAN...

NO... NO... I REALLY MUST GO ON...

...PERHAPS MILADY WOULD FANCY A HOT BATH?

...ER ...DID YOU SAY...

...A HOT BATH...?

...AHHHHHH... GLORIOUS DAY! THIS IS WHAT I'VE NEEDED AFTER A WEEK ON THE ROAD!

I'VE FORGOTTEN THE GENEROSITY OF LEP'KUFFT HOSPITALITY... AND HAVE MISSED IT MORE THAN I'D REALIZED!

THIS MAY BE A GOOD TIME TO APPLY SOME OF MY MAGIKDUST.

HMM. JUST A PINCH SHOULD BE ENOUGH...

OH WELL!

...MMMMMMM...! THAT FEELS SO WONDERFUL!

COMING TO THIS INN HAS REAWAKENED OLD MEMORIES... I REMEMBER A LEP... IT WAS A LONG TIME AGO...

...IT WAS SUCH A GOOD TIME... I WONDER... WHATEVER HAPPENED...?

...YOU HAD NO RIGHT! WHAT I DO IS MY AFFAIR, AND NONE OF...

...FELICIA, YOU MUST FORSAKE YOUR ANGER AND RECANT YOUR OATH...

NO! NEVER! I WILL NOT FORSAKE MY BIRTHRIGHT!

THEN THERE'S NOTHING MORE. MAY ALN FORGIVE YOU!

...NO...

UH!

LA! THIS WINE HAS MADE ME MELANCHOLY!

I THINK I NEED SOME CHEERING UP. I'LL GO DOWN TO THE MAIN HALL AND LISTEN TO THE MUSICIAN... DRINK SOME MORE WINE.... MAYBE EVEN DANCE A LITTLE... AND... WELL... WHO KNOWS WHAT ELSE?

...I JUST FINISHED LAYING OUT MILADY FOX'S EVENING DRESS, AND WHAT DO YOU SUPPOSE I FOUND? A BOOK OF MAGIC SPELLS!

MM-HMMM.

SHE IS MAGI! PERAN'L, SHE IS A SORCERESS!

I KNOW.

YOU KNOW!?

MELARI, I HAVE BEEN AROUND IN MY TIME; I KNOW A MAGI WHEN I SEE ONE!

BUT, WHY WERE YOU... OH, PER! YOU'RE NOT GOING TO DRAG HER INTO OUR TROUBLES!

I HAD ANOTHER MATTER IN MIND... BUT WHAT IF I DID?

BUT THIS IS WRONG! IT IS NOT THE LEPKUFFT WAY TO INVOLVE OTHERS IN OUR... DIFFICULTIES!

LISTEN TO ME!

WE HAVE TAKEN HER IN AS A GUEST; SHE WILL ENJOY HERSELF; AND WHEN THE PROBLEMS BEGIN THIS EVENING, SHE WILL TEND TO THEM IN ORDER TO CONVENIENCE HERSELF. THUS HER TROUBLES AND OURS ARE RESOLVED, AND IT WILL COST US NO EXTRA FEE. CLEVER, RIGHT?

IF YOU SAY SO, PER... BUT... TRICKING A MAGI! ...I DON'T KNOW

I FEAR THAT THE FEE WILL COST MORE THAN YOU MAY THINK!"

AH! THIS IS MORE LIKE IT!

— Charles E. Harrison

HOSTESS, BRING ME A GOBLET OF YOUR FINEST WINE, IF YOU PLEASE!

...YES, MILADY.

...AN' DEN I TOL' HER, "ONLY ON YER BACK, BABY!" HAW HAW!

CURS!

AH, MINSTREL! PERHAPS YOU WOULD PLAY A MERRY TUNE FOR US?

A PLEASURE, MILADY! PERHAPS A BALLAD OF JOLLY BEN JOLLY?

JOLLY BEN JOLLY, HE TRICKED THE DEMON AND THEN HE STOLE THE DIAMONDS FROM ITS CAVE...

BOO! HEY! WE DON'T WANNA HEAR 'BOUT NO DUMB RAKUNE!

YEAH! SING US A REAL DOG'S SONG!

...GENTLEMEN...

HAH!? WHO WALKED IN?

...PLEASE... OTHERS ARE TRYING TO QUIETLY ENJOY THEIR MEALS...

HEY! HE SAID "PLEASE"!

WASSA MATTER, LONGEARS? WE NOT GOOD COM'ANY FER YA T'NITE?

WHY DON'T YOU JUST HOP BACK INTA TH' KITCHEN AN' MAKE SOME MOR'A YER SALADS, HUH?

UF! LOOK, THERE'S NO NEED...

'BOUT ALL THEY'RE GOOD FER, EH, MATES? WIMMEN'S WORK! CAN'T CARRY A SWORD, A'ONE A'THEM...!

SIRS, PLEASE!

OH, GUR! I KNEW THIS WOULD HAPPEN!

PLEASE! LET US MAINTAIN HARMONY...

NAH, IT'S NOT THAT THEY CAN'T CARRY A SWORD, BOWSER; THEY JUST WON'T!

YEH... DEY'RE PASI... PASSY...

...UH, DEY DON'T FIGHT!

COURSE, WE COULD BE WRONG...

LET'S SEE!

OOF!

SNAP!

NO, WE WUZ RIGHT!

THE RABBIT'S A CHICKEN!

HAW! HAW!

HAW! HAW!

HAVE SOME ALE, INNKEEPER!

STUPID RABBITS! OPENING AN INN IN OUR VILLAGE...!

(SIGH)

GENTLE SIRS, COULD WE NOT FOREGO THIS UNPLEASANTNESS?

LOOK, LADY, GO SIDDOWN! NUTHIN'S GONNA STOP US FROM TEACHIN' THIS RABBIT A LESSON!

OH? NOT EVEN IF I WERE TO SAY...

...PLEASE?

BOOM

AFTER ALL...

I AM TRYING TO LISTEN TO THE MUSIC!

C'MON, ROVER... WE'LL GET YOU HOME...

...OOOOOKAAAYYYY... ...YOU KNOW SUMN, BOWSER...?

...I DON' FEEL SO GOOD...

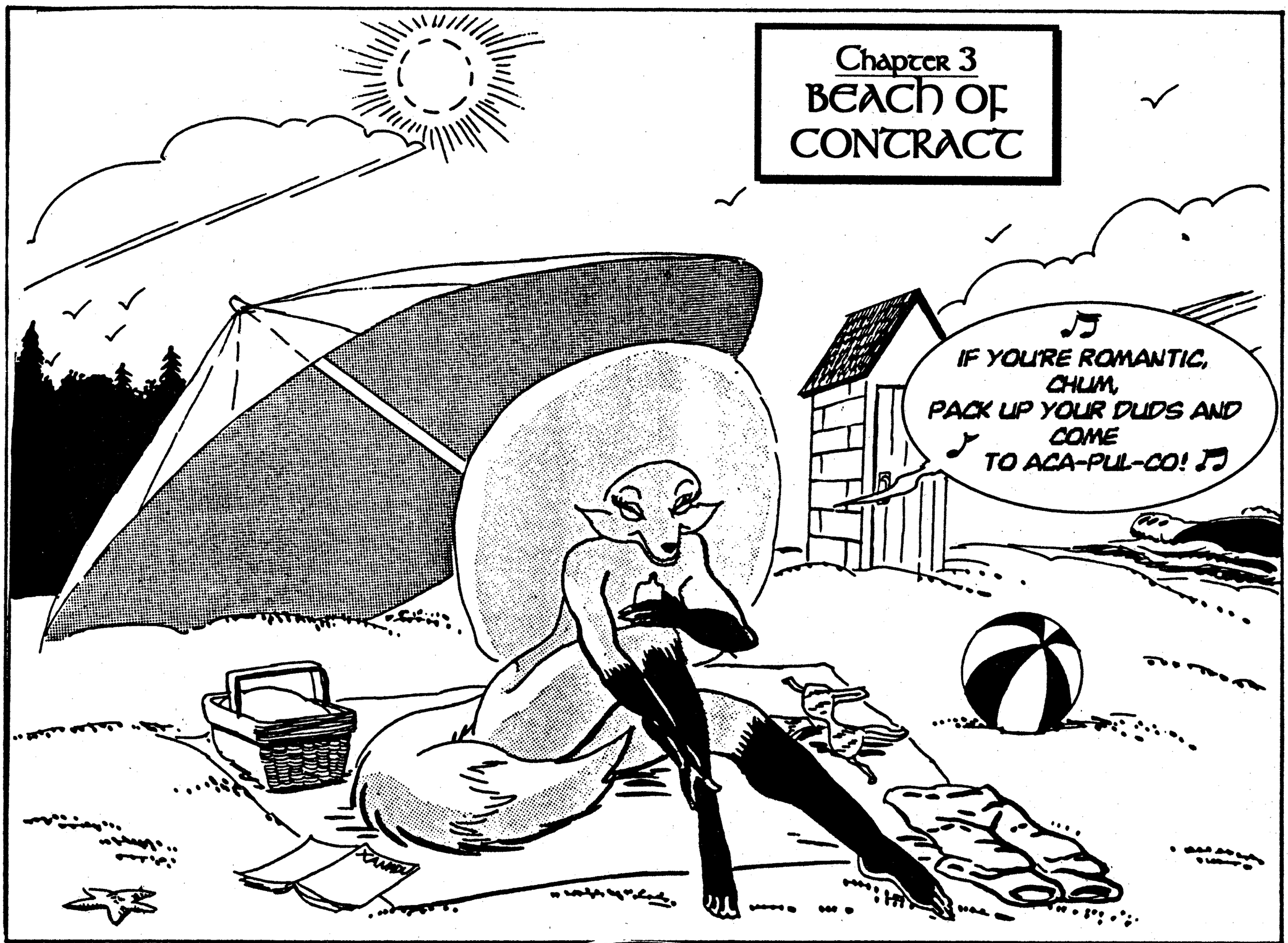
YOU SEE, MELARI? I TOLD YOU THAT IT WOULD WORK!

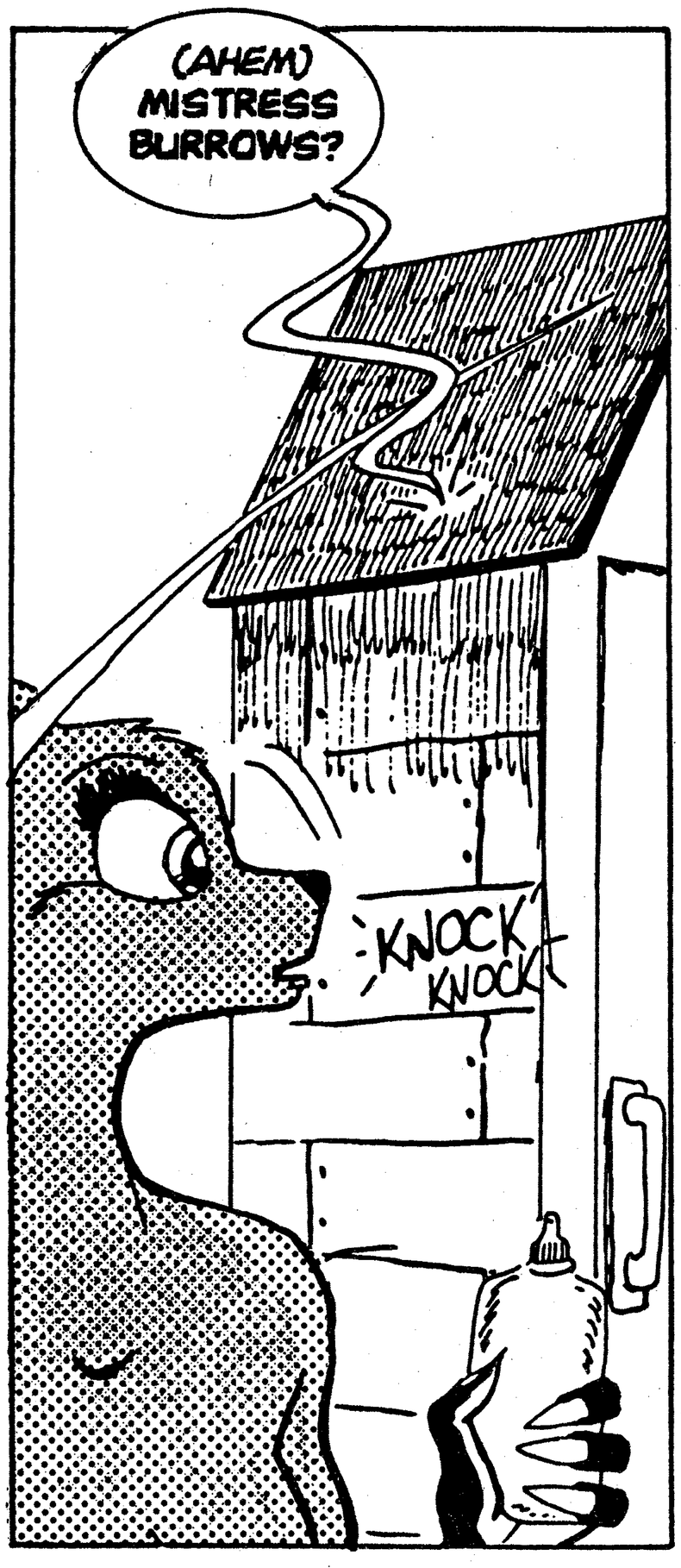
AND IT COST US NOTHING!

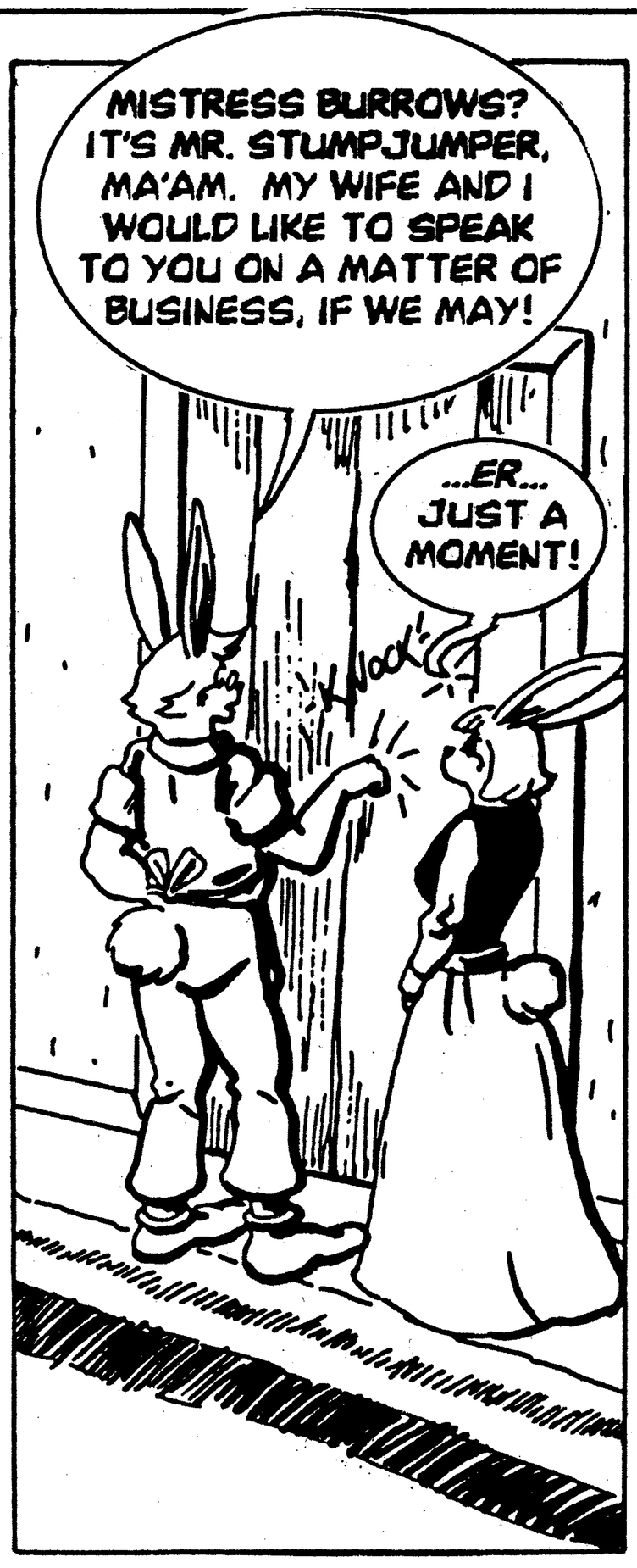
REALLY.

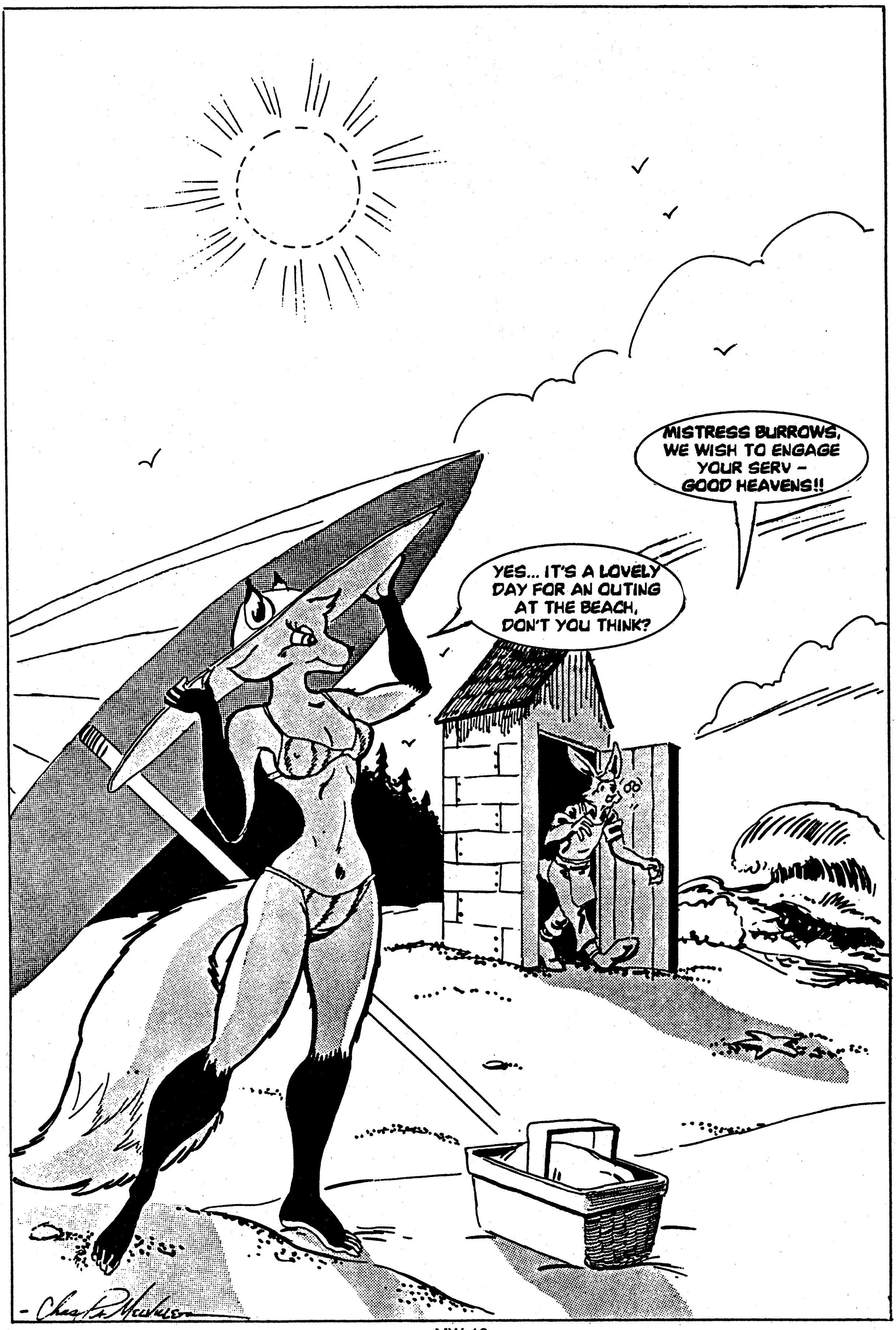
I TRUST YOU'LL STILL FEEL THAT WAY WHEN THE CARPENTER AND THE MORTARER ARRIVE TOMORROW!

Chapter 3
BEACH OF CONTRACT








MISTRESS BURROWS, WE WISH TO ENGAGE YOUR SERV - GOOD HEAVENS!!
YES... IT'S A LOVELY DAY FOR AN OUTING AT THE BEACH, DON'T YOU THINK?
- Charles McWilson

HOW... WHERE...?

OH, I JUST CONJURED A TRANSPATIAL-CONDUIT TO THE SEASHORE!

BUT... THAT'S SOME FIVE HUNDRED MILES AWAY!

(GASP) MILADY!

DON'T LOOK, PERAN'L!

HUH!

TSK! I FORGOT WE'RE STILL LIVING IN THE MIDDLE AGES!

THERE! THIS IS A BIT MORE... CONSERVATIVE, I THINK!

...BUT...

GOOD GUR!

NOW... WHAT CAN I DO FOR YOU, INNKEEPER?

...UM... ...UH... OH, YES! WE WISH TO ENGAGE YOUR SERVICES...

...IN HELPING US TO FIND A LOST FAMILY HEIRLOOM!

WE'LL PAY YOU WELL FOR YOUR EFFORTS!

I'M SORRY, BUT I'M NOT A LOST AND FOUND. AND IT'S TOO NICE A DAY TO WORK.

...BUT...

...WE'RE WILLING TO PAY YOU 500 DUFAS* FOR YOUR TROUBLE...

I'M SORRY, BUT I'M AFRAID NOT...

*ABOUT 640 DOLLARS

BUT IT'S A SMALL THING, REALLY... JUST A RING... WITH A UNICORN ETCHED ON ITS GEM SETTING...

A UNICORN ETCHED ON THE GEM, YOU SAY?

YES... IT WAS MARKED BY ITS...

JUST A MOMENT...

?

TELL ME... IS THIS THE RING YOU MEAN?

WHY, YES! THAT'S IT! DO YOU ALREADY HAVE IT, THEN?

NO. NO, I DON'T. HMMMMMM...

WELL, THEN... IT'S VERY IMPORTANT THAT WE FIND THIS RING... IF YOU WOULD JUST RECONSIDER...

ALL RIGHT. MY FEE IS 5000 DUFAS. PLUS I'LL NEED TO HIRE ON EXTRA HELP, SO THEY WILL COST AS WELL. PLUS EXPENSES...

WHAT!? NO! NO!

500 DUFAS! ...600 AT BEST!

OH, LET'S BE REAL, INNKEEPER!

THAT'S RIGHT! I'M AN INNKEEPER! NOT A BANKER!

YOU REALIZE, SIR, THAT SINCE THIS IS OBVIOUSLY A MAGIC RING... OH, YES! I RECOGNIZED IT RIGHT AWAY...

...THAT I WOULD BE WITHIN MY PROFESSIONAL RIGHTS IT I WERE TO SEEK IT FOR MY OWN!

?

...UH ...WELL...

PARDON, MILADY... BUT IS THERE SOMEONE WADING IN THE WATER JUST THERE...? SEE THE HEAD BOBBING IN THE WAVES?

OH, THAT'S JUST RONALD! YOU SEE, DEAR, BEFORE YOU CAME, THIS WAS A PRIVATE BEACH!

THE POOR DEAR WON'T COME OUT WHILE YOU'RE HERE UNLESS I BRING HIM HIS PANTS!

OH, MY!

IT'S A SHAME HE WON'T COME OUT... HE'S USUALLY VERY FRIENDLY!

...AND HE HAS THE CUTEST TUSH...

...MISTRESS BURROWS...

AND SO DO YOU.

UH...

MELARI, WHAT CAN I...?

YOO-HOO! RONALD!

PER! YOU MUST COMPROMISE!

(AHEM) YOU MIGHT LOOK FOR THE RING ON YOUR WON, BUT WE HAVE THE INFORMATION REGARDING ITS WHEREABOUTS...

BUT YOU NEED ME TO FETCH IT FOR YOU.

YES. WE WILL PAY YOU... (SIGH) 2000 DUFAS... AND YOU MAY KEEP THE RING AS WELL...

YOU'LL GIVE...!?

...PROVIDED WE GET ONE WISH FROM IT! THAT'S ALL WE REALLY WANTED ANYWAY!

HMMM

ALL RIGHT. I AGREE TO THE TERMS! YOU GET A WISH, AND I GET THE RING!

NOW...

...WHY DON'T WE SEAL THIS WITH A KISS?

...UH....

...ALL RIGHT!

!

SMEK

THAT'S NOT WHAT I MEANT!

ONE MORE THING: MELARI MUST ACCOMPANY YOU ON YOUR SEARCH!

MELARI? YOUR WIFE!?

WHAT'S SO IMPORTANT ABOUT HER COMING WITH ME?

IT'S TO BE HER WISH.

ALL RIGHT. SHE CAN COME. I JUST HOPE SHE CAN BE USEFUL.

GOOD! HERE'S THE CONTRACT!

WHY, THIS IS A RAKUNIAN CONTRACT! THERE'S NOTHING TIGHTER THAN ONE OF THESE!

ALL RIGHT, I'LL SIGN IT! BUT.,.

YOU REALIZE THE PENALTIES ON IT APPLY TO YOU AS WELL?

YES, WELL, THAT'S YOUR SECURITY THAT WE KEEP OUR PART OF THE DEAL.

COME, LET US GO AND BEGIN MAKING OUR PREPARATIONS!

YOU DIDN'T THINK I'D FORGET ABOUT YOU, DID YOU, YOU SILLY BOY?

NO, NO! ...YOU'LL HAVE TO COME OUT IF YOU WANT ME TO GIVE YOU YOUR PANTS! *GIGGLE*

Chapter 4
NAME'S SAKE

CLANG!

YAH!

CLANG!

CLANG!

ON THE ESTATES OF THE DUKE CLA DI HOWLER...

THE GIRL FIGHTS WELL, MILORD...

...HMMM...

BAH! SHE'S VERY BADLY UNTRAINED!

"SEE! JAKAL'S GOT HER MEASURE NOW!"

HOLA!

WHOOP!

HAH!

CLANG

UH!

NO!

ARGH!

THUD-D-D-D.

A VALIANT MATCH, YOUNG FAREL, BUT I'M AFRAID MY DECISION IS UNCHANGED.

...MILARD...!

...MILARD, I BESEECH YOU! I KNOW I CAN BEAT YAR MAN! HE WILL NOT BE SO LUCKY THE NEXT TIME! I KNOW I'M WARTHY ENOUGH TO BE A KNIGHT!

I AM SORRY, BUT MY DECISION, AND MY POLICY, REMAIN UNCHANGED.

I WILL HAVE NO FEMALE KNIGHTS IN MY SERVICE. NOW... OR EVER.

MILORD, IF I MAY SPEAK...

SIR, I FEEL IT IS A MISTAKE TO NOT ACCEPT FAREL'S SERVICE. TRUE, SHE IS RAW...

BUT TRAINING WILL SERVE TO STRENGTHEN HER ARM AND IMPROVE HER SKILLS...

YOU MAY, KNI JAKAL.

AND IT'S NOT AS THOUGH FEMALE KNIGHTS ARE UNKNOWN! WE DOGONIANS DON'T PAMPER OUR WOMEN THE WAY THE KATARANS DO THEIRS!

NO, KNI JAKAL; I AM SORRY. GOOD FORTUNE TO YOU, YOUNG FAREL.

THANK... THANK YOU, MILARD.

I AM SORRY, FAREL; I TRULY BELIEVED THAT YOU SHOWED PROMISE.

THANK YOU, KNI JAKAL. AR, IT'S ALL SO UNFAR!

TELL ME... WHY DOES BEING A KNIGHT MEAN SO MUCH TO YOU?

IT IS BECAUSE I HAVE NO FAMILY NAME. MY MOTHIR IS DEAD THESE PAST THREE YIRS, AND MY FATHIR IS UNKNOWN TO ME.

NOT AN ONCOMMON TALE, I KNOW, BUT ALL OF MY LIFE I HAVE BEEN JUST '*FAREL*'. I SHOULD LIKE TO BE '*FAREL KNI DI SOMEBODY*' AND IRN AN HONARABLE NAME TO BE PROUD OF!

I'VE NO WISH TO MORRY FAR A NAME, FAR I WISH FAR ADVENTURE AND TO NOT BE CHAINED SO SOON. MY MOTHIR WAS A KNIGHT; I THOUGHT I WOULD DO THE SAME, HIR WHIR SHE ONCE LIVED.

YOUNG FAREL!

PERHAPS!

PERHAPS THERE MAY BE A PLACE FOR YOU WITH MY KNIGHTS!

BUT YOU ARE STILL UNSKILLED. I WILL NOT HAVE AN UNSKILLED KNIGHT IN MY SERVICE!

...BUT...

YOU NEED EXPERIENCE! GO TO THE SKY PILLAR MOUNTAINS AND SEEK YOUR ADVENTURES, IF YOU WILL!

THIS WILL HELP YOU TO FIND THE EXPERIENCES YOU NEED TO STRENGTHEN YOUR SKILLS.

AND THEN... YOU WILL MAKE ME A KNIGHT?

PERHAPS.

PERHAPS.

HA! HA! HA!

HA! HA! HA!

HA! HA! OH, HE'S MARVELOUS! SIMPLY MARVELOUS!

"GO TO THE SKY PILLAR MOUNTAINS" INDEED! HA! HA!

WHO...?

MA NAME IS FELICIA CLA DI BURROWS, AND AS YOU CAN SEE, I AM A WISARNA*!

THE DUKE CLA DI HOWLER WANTS YOU TO 'GO FIND ADVENTURE IN THE SKY PILLAR MOUNTAINS'!

HAH! THAT'S WHERE HE SENDS HIS MOST PRECIOUS TREASURES FOR SAFEKEEPING!

BUT I'VE SEEN THROUGH HIS CHARADE! OH, YES!

*SORCERESS

MY DEAR, IT IS VERY FORTUNATE INDEED THAT I WAS PASSING BY THIS WAY; IT JUST SO HAPPENS THAT I AM IN NEED OF A RECRUIT TO JOIN ME UPON A QUEST THAT I AM ABOUT TO UNDERTAKE!

YOUR ACCENT TELLS ME THAT YOU'RE FROM THE RAKUNIAN BORDER AREA; AS IT HAPPENS, MY QUEST LIES IN THAT VERY DIRECTION. WE WILL NEED A GUIDE, AND A BODYGUARD... AND A HUNTRESS!

WELL... IT'S TRUE THAT I MUST SEEK EMPLOYMENT...

IN RETURN FOR YOUR SERVICES, I WILL PERSONALLY TRAIN YOU AS A WARRIOR; I AM WELL VERSED IN ALL THE ARTS!

VIRY WELL! I AGREE! I SHALL BE YIR GUIDE!

EXCELLENT! THERE IS A VILLAGE SOME FIFTY LEAGUES SOUTHEAST OF HERE!

COME TO THE INN THERE IN TWO WEEKS.

AYE! I SHALL BE THIR, SARCERESS!

WAIT! AREN'T YOU INTERESTED IN KNOWING WHAT THE QUEST IS FOR?

HAH! WHAT DO I CAR WHAT YOU QUEST FAR?

YAR QUEST IS NOW MINE, AND I KNOW WHAT I AM QUESTING FAR!

...AND YOU'VE GIVEN ME THE CHANCE TO WIN ME A NAME!!

Chapter 5
SNEAKS, SNAKES, SNACKS

PUFF PUFF PUFF
HARDCHEESE IS THE NAME...
WILFRID R. J. HARDCHEESE III.
PUFF PUFF
I AM AN ACTING OFFICER
OF THE RODENTARIAN SOCIETY,
HERE AT THE REQUEST OF
MR & MRS STUMPJUMPER.
PUFF

THE SOCIETY HAS INVESTIGATED VERY CAREFULLY THE STUMPJUMPER'S CLAIM TO THIS RING THAT WE HAVE BEEN DISCUSSING. IT SO HAPPENS THAT I MYSELF HAVE FIRST-HAND INFORMATION ON THIS MATTER. YES, INDEED; I DID A GREAT DEAL OF FACT-GATHERING WHEN I WAS A YOUNG RODENT, STILL IN THE PRIME OF MY YOUTH. "*WILFIE THE BOLD*" THEY ALL CALLED ME, DON'T YOU KNOW? DID I EVER TELL YOU OF HOW I BRAVED THE UNKNOWN TERRORS OF LOST, FABLED MURALK?

DO TELL!

HOW MUCH LONGER?

NOT MUCH... ALMOST THERE...

"AH, YES! MANY WERE THE TIMES WHEN I WAS REQUIRED TO RISK HAND AND LIMB TO ACQUIRE LOST INFORMATION, FOR, AS YOU KNOW, A MOUSE IS ONLY AS WEALTHY AS THE INFORMATION OF HIS DATA-HOARD...!"

"BRAVELY, I DESCENDED INTO THE CAVERNOUS PITS OF THE REMAINS OF ANCIENT MURALK, MY VERY LIFE DANGLING FROM A SINGLE, SLENDER ROPE!"

"AND THERE, DEEP IN THOSE DANK BOWELS, I FOUND A RANSOM IN GEMS AND JEWELS... THE STOCKBINS OF OLD JERBYL PARMESAN THE GEMSMITH HIMSELF!"

"HOWEVER..."

"...I ALSO DISCOVERED THAT I WAS NOT ALONE!"

AH!

I'M THROUGH!

GI' ME A HAND HERE, SO'S WE CAN CLIMB UP!

"THE CAVERNS HAD LONG SINCE BEEN RECLAIMED BY SNAKES!"

"SNAKES! BLOODY, BEASTLY THINGS!"

"WHY DID IT HAVE TO BE SNAKES? I HATE SNAKES!"

HEY! WATCH IT!

SORRY!

NEVER MIND; JUST DIG!

"BRAVELY, I MET THE CHALLENGE, WAVING MY BRAND AT THEM..."

"BUT, ALAS, THEY WERE TOO MANY FOR EVEN A STOUT FELLOW LIKE MYSELF, AND I SOON FELL FLAILING BENEATH THEIR ASSAULT!"

GOOD HEAVENS! WHAT HAPPENED THEN?

PUFF

PUFF

...WELL... WHAT HAPPENED THEN...

WELL, IT WAS ONLY NATURAL, YOU SEE...

THEY ATE ME, MY DEAR!

WE DONE IT! WE DONE IT, DOOLEY! WE BROKE INTA TH' VAULT!!

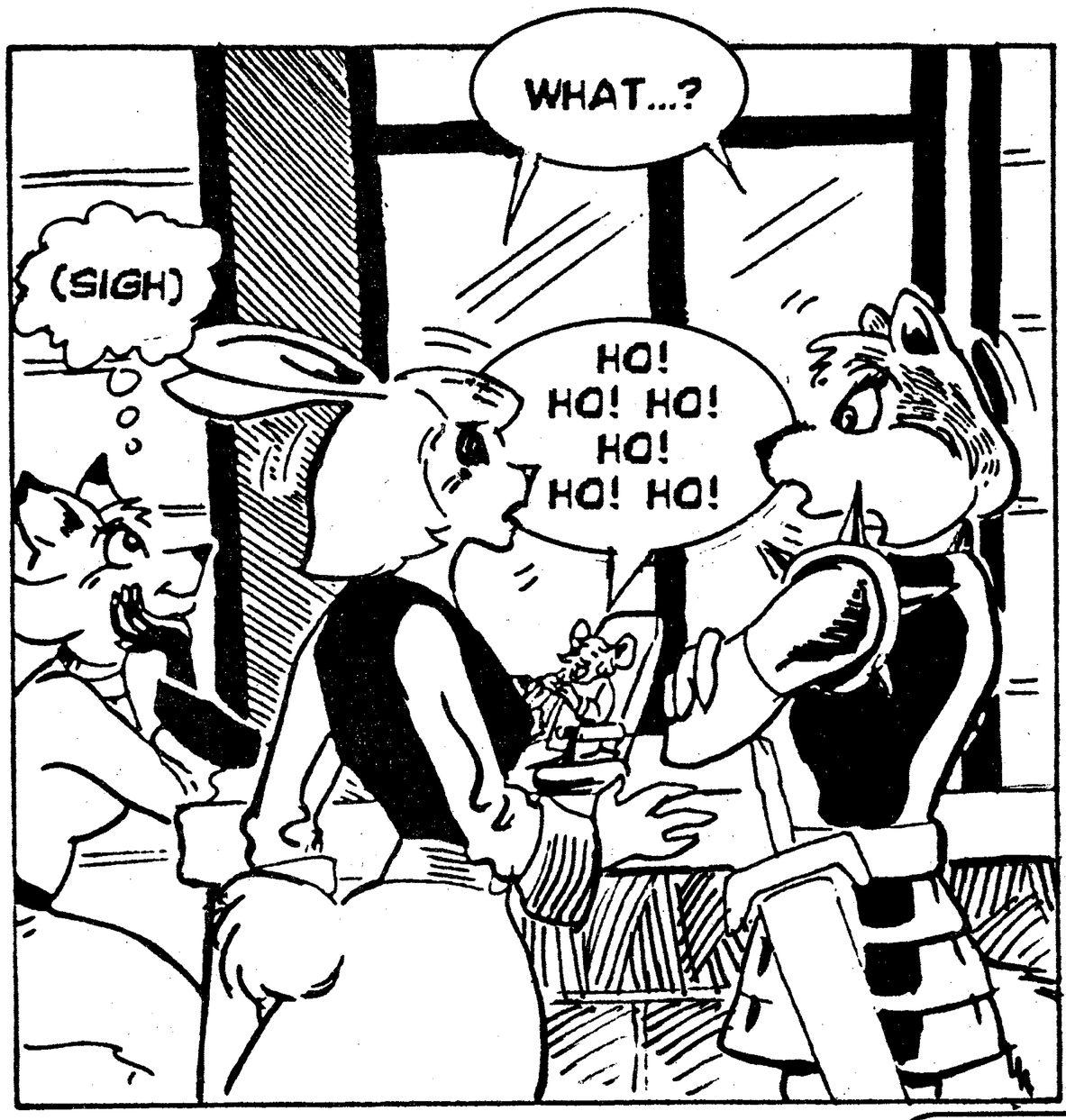
HUH! SOME VAULT! TH' GUY'S TOO TIGHT FER IRON 'N' LOCKS... SO HE HIDES HIS STASH INNA PANTRY CUPBOARD!

SHUDDUP! YOU IDIOT!

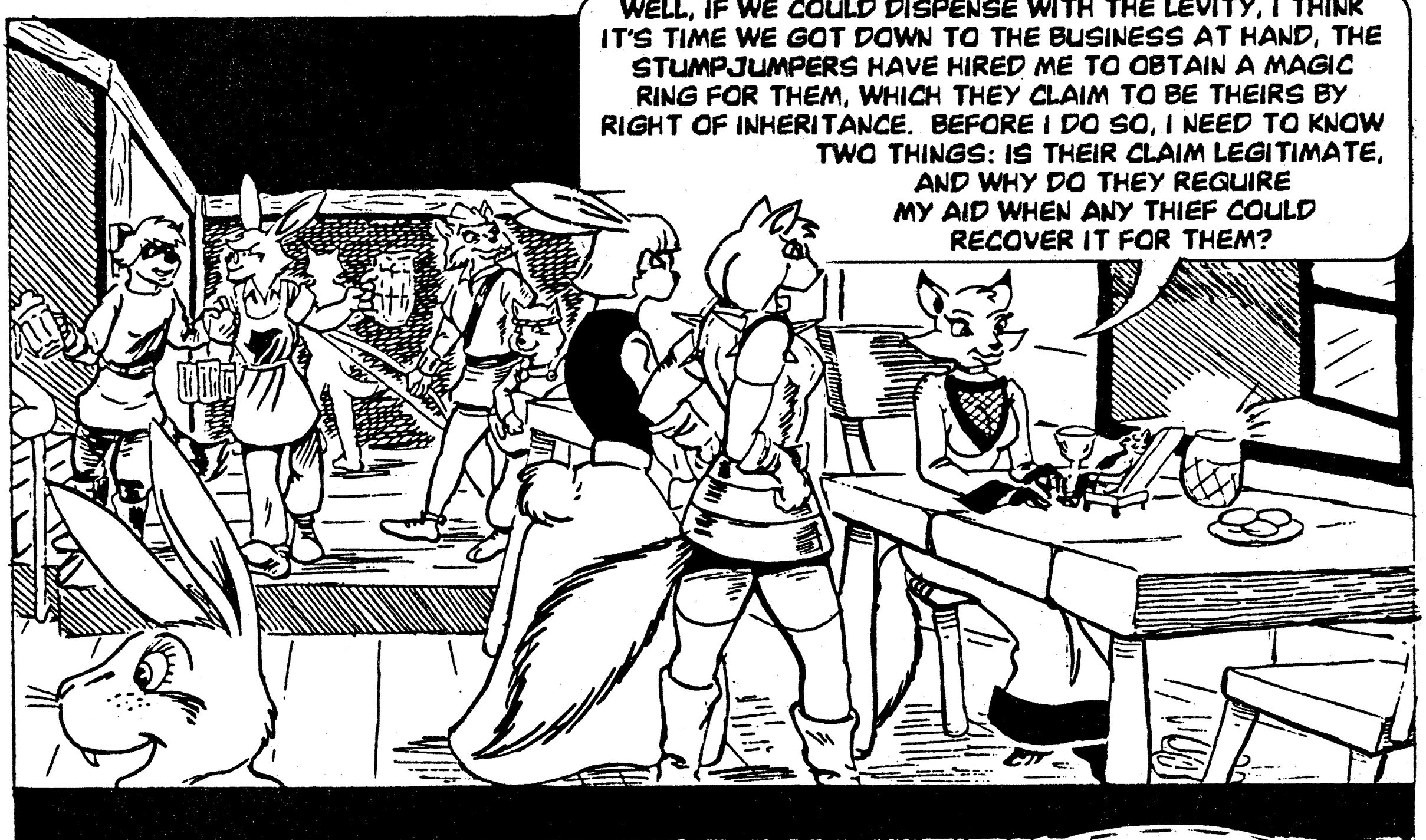
Y' WANT 'EM TO HEAR US?!

GEEZ! LOOKIT TH' MONEY!

MMMMPPH!


WHAT...?
(SIGH)
HO! HO! HO! HO! HO! HO!

HO! HO! HO! OH, THAT WAS A JOLLY GOOD ONE, WASN'T IT?
YES, IT CERTAINLY WAS!
YOU JUST CANNOT BEAT THE CLASSICS, I ALWAYS SAY!


WELL, IF WE COULD DISPENSE WITH THE LEVITY, I THINK IT'S TIME WE GOT DOWN TO THE BUSINESS AT HAND, THE STUMPJUMPERS HAVE HIRED ME TO OBTAIN A MAGIC RING FOR THEM, WHICH THEY CLAIM TO BE THEIRS BY RIGHT OF INHERITANCE. BEFORE I DO SO, I NEED TO KNOW TWO THINGS: IS THEIR CLAIM LEGITIMATE, AND WHY DO THEY REQUIRE MY AID WHEN ANY THIEF COULD RECOVER IT FOR THEM?

...GOOD! NO ONE'S HEARD US! LET'S GET TO WORK, THEN!

START FILLING UP THE BAG, DOOFUS!

ER... YOU DID BRING IT THIS TIME, DIDN'T YOU?
SURE I DID!

WELL, MADAM, THIS PART OF MY LITTLE STORY IS TRUE: I DID GO INTO LOST MURALK, AND I HAVE RECOVERED CERTAIN PAPERS AND JEWELRY THAT HAD ONCE BELONGED TO THE GREAT GEMSMITH, JERBYL PARMESAN.

HE FASHIONED FIVE RINGS FROM THE SAME MAGIC WISHGEM THAT HE MADE THE FAMOUS WISHGEM PENDANT FROM. ALL BUT ONE OF THE RINGS HAVE SINCE BEEN RECOVERED OR ACCOUNTED FOR.

HMM.

THIS ONE RING WAS GIVEN BY JERBYL TO HIS GOOD FRIEND, ...UM ...AROS STUMPJUMPER.

THE RING WAS LATER STOLEN FROM AROS' HEIR. REGARDLESS OF IT'S CURRENT WHEREABOUTS, THERE IS NO QUESTION THAT THE RIGHTFUL AND LEGAL OWNER IS AROS' PRESENT HEIR: PERAN'L STUMPJUMPER.

VERY WELL. FOR EVERYBODY'S BENEFIT, IF YOU DON'T ALREADY KNOW, THE WISHGEM PENDANT WAS ONE OF THE WORLD'S MOST POTENT MAGIC TALISMANS. WE MAGI DISPOSED OF IT MANY YEARS AGO, THE RINGS STILL EXIST, AND THEY CARRY A SMALL PART OF THAT MAGIC POWER!

SEE?

OKAY, OKAY... JUST START FILLIN' IT UP! BIGGER COINS FIRST...!

CRUNCH

YOU BROKE THE MONEY!

WAIT A MINNIT! WHAT'S COMIN' OFF HERE?!

WHERE IS THE RING NOW?

IT IS IN THE KEEPING OF A BARON SWIFTY...

...OF THE BORDER-LANDS? YOU HAVE BEEN THOROUGH! I DREAD TO HEAR WHAT SECRETS YOU MUST HAVE BARTERED TO GET THIS INFORMATION FROM THE RODENTARIANS, PERAN'L!

WELL, AN INNKEEPER CAN'T HELP BUT HEAR MANY THINGS...!

OH, YES! ONE MORE THING: HIS LANDS ARE RUMORED TO BE GUARDED BY SOME SORT OF DEMON OR MONSTER!

WHAT KIND?

SADLY, WE COULD NOT LEARN...

NO MATTER. I THINK THAT IT IS VERY WELL POSSIBLE THAT I WILL NEED JUST A LITTLE MORE HELP ON THIS JOB!

IS THIS WHERE THE PASTRIES ARE KEPT?

MAGIC ISN'T ALWAYS NECESSARY, AND I'D AS SOON NOT RELY ON IT IF WE DON'T NEED TO. SOMEBODY SLY AND ADEPT MAY BE ABLE TO DO THE JOB EASIER!

...AND I KNOW JUST WHO TO GET...!

CLICK

'SUMPIN' AIN'T SQUARE HERE! LESSEE THIS MONEY...!

HEY! THIS AIN'T COINS! DEY'RE COOKIES!!

MMMM! 'BRAZZLE-BERRY CHIPS!

MY FAVORITE!

...AND WHO HAVE WE HERE?

OOOOOOO!

WELL, WELL! IF IT ISN'T THE DRUTHERS BROTHERS!

.....

YOU SEE, PERAN'L? THAT RUMOR I PASSED ON ABOUT YOUR KEEPING YOUR MONEY IN YOUR PANTRY HAS NETTED US TWO MORE VOLUNTEERS!

WAIT A MINNIT!

WAIT A MINNIT!

THESE TWO ARE THE SLIPPERIEST THIEVES IN ALL OF RA KUNA!

ER... GOOD COOKIES!

AND THEY'RE JUST ALL TOO HAPPY TO JOIN OUR LITTLE EXPEDITION!

WE AIN'T GONNA COME!

DO I HAVE TO BE CREATIVE WITH YOU BOYS...?

OH, IS THIS WHERE WE SIGN?

ER...PARDON ME, MADAM; PROFESSIONAL CURIOSITY, Y'KNOW... WHATEVER DID BECOME OF THE PENDANT?

AH, THAT'S THE SECOND GREATEST SECRET THAT WE MAGI HAVE!

DO YOU THINK YOU COULD AFFORD THE PRICE OF LEARNING IT? HMMMMM?

Chapter 6
LEAVETAKING

...MELARI...?

THE OTHERS ARE ALMOST READY... HAVE YOU FINISHED PACKING?

NEARLY...

I'VE WRITTEN TO MY SISTER IN CANINA... SHE SHOULD BE HERE IN ABOUT A WEEK TO HELP YOU WITH THE INN...

I...

OH, PERAN'L! I JUST DON'T KNOW! IS THIS RIGHT? TO SEARCH FOR MAGIC TO... TO SOLVE OUR PROBLEMS FOR US...?

IT'S AGAINST ALL OF THE TEACHINGS OF THE LEP'ALN*!

MELARI... I MAY HAVE SET THIS UP... BUT IT WAS YOUR IDEA... REMEMBER?

*THE LEP'KUFFT FAITH.

...I KNOW...

OH, PER!

I JUST HAVE TO!

SHHH... I KNOW...

...I KNOW.

DO BE CAREFUL WITH THOSE BAGS, FAREL!

AR! IS IT NECESSORY TO TAKE SO MANY BAGS WITH US? WE SHOULD BE TRAVELING LIGHT!

NOTHING WRONG WITH A LITTLE LUXURY, DEAR!

AFTER ALL... WE'RE JUST LOOKING FOR A MAGIC RING...

...NOT THE HOLY GRAIL!

HUH! WHEN I AGREED TO AR CONTRACT, I HAD NO IDEA I'D WIND UP WARKIN' FAR SOME LONG-IRRED HOPPIR!

NOW, LET'S STOP RIGHT THERE!

I WANT SOMETHING UNDERSTOOD BETWEEN US, FAREL! YOU WILL USE NO DEROGATORY LANGUAGE IN REGARDS TO MELARI...

OR TO ANY LEP'KUFFT!

I UNDERSTAND HOW BIGOTED DOGONIANS ARE TOWARDS THE LEP, BUT I WILL NOT TOLERATE IT; THERE IS NO REAL JUSTIFICATION FOR IT!

HMMP!

YOU DON'T HAVE TO WARRY, SARCERESS. I DON'T LET MY FEELINGS INTAFAR WITH WHAT I PROMISED THAT I WOULD DO.

HMMM. THAT OLD DOGONIAN SENSE OF HONOR, NO DOUBT!

AND CALL ME "FELICIA"! "SORCERESS" IS MUCH TOO FORMAL FOR TRAVELING COMPANIONS!

IT'S NOT PROPIR TO ADDRESS A TEACHER SO FAMILIARLY!

(SIGH) OH, ALL RIGHT! CALL ME WISAR* IF FEEL THAT YOU MUST!

YES, WISOR.

*TEACHER.

"DEAR MA, ME AN' DOOFUS GOT A JOB, BUT DUN'T WORRY ITS LEGIT ONLY FOR A LIDDLE WILE..."

"WE BOTH GOT TO SINE A CONTRACK... WE CAN'T ROB LADY FOX..."

"WE CAN'T ROB LADY WOLF, WE CAN'T ROB LADY RABBIT, WE CAN'T ROB NOBUDDY TIL FOX SEZ WE CAN..."

"...AN' IT ALL DOOFUS' FAULT, TOO!"

HEY! HEY! DON'T TELL HER THAT!

IT AIN'T MY FAULT WE GOTTA GO, DOOLEY!

IT WUZ UNNER DURESS! SHE WUZ THREATENIN' US!

YES IT IS! YOU WUZ DA ONE WHO SIGNED DA CONTRACK FIRST!

Y'THINK DA THIEVES' GUILD GIVES A HOOT?

EVEN DEY GOTTA FOLLA A RAKUNIAN CONTRACK TO DA LETTER!

AN' DEY'LL SKIN US IF WE DON'T!

AN'... AN' ANYWAY... YOU DUNNO HOW TO WRITE!

S'OKAY. MA CAN'T READ ANYWAY!

HOWCUM YOU WROTE HER A LETTER IF SHE CAN'T READ?

I DON'T WANT HER TA THINK I'M DUMB!

NOW, NEVER MIND, AN' GO GET DA PONIES!

...I ALWAYS GOTTA GET TH' PONIES...!

S'LONG AS WE GOTTA BE ROAD BUDDIES, HOW'S 'BOUT I HELPS YA WIT' YER HORSE...?

NO!

...AND IF YOU LAY A HAND ON HIM, I'LL SLICE IT FROM YOUR WRIST!

GEEZ... NO COOKIES FER DAT ONE, DOOFUS; SHE'S NASTY!

?

MISS FAREL... I JUST WANTED TO TELL YOU THAT I APPRECIATE YOUR ACCOMPANYING US, AND THAT I HOPE WE CAN BE GOOD FRIENDS...

I JUST HOPE THAT PRETTY MOR' OF YARS CAN KEEP UP WITH THE REST OF US!

MY!

WHAT A LOVELY MORNING FOR A RIDE THROUGH THE COUNTRYSIDE!

NOW, THEN, ARE WE ALL READY AND SET TO GO - EH?

OO! OO!

WHAT IS IT?

PSSST! PSSST! PSSST!

OH, FOR CANDLE'S SAKE...! GO NOW!

YES, MA'AM!

NOW, THEN, JUST SO THAT WE'RE ALL CLEAR ON EACH OF OUR DUTIES FOR THIS JOURNEY...

I AM TO RECOVER THE RING AND TO TEACH FAREL HER SWORDSMANSHIP; FAREL SHALL SCOUT, HUNT, AND DO ANY BODYGUARDING WE MIGHT REQUIRE...

MELARI SHALL BE OUR COOK AND NURSE; AND THE BROTHERS WILL DO ANY NECESSARY THIEVING WE MIGHT NEED.

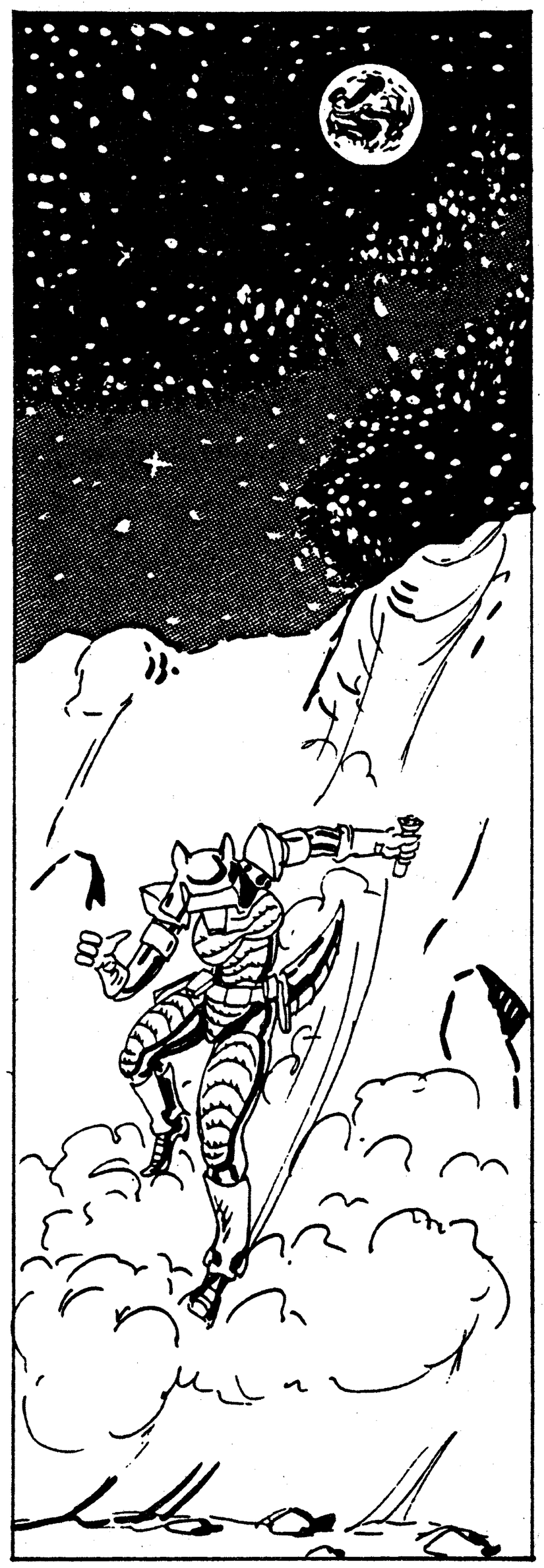
WITH ANY LUCK, WE SHOULD BE BACK LONG BEFORE THE WINTER BEGINS.

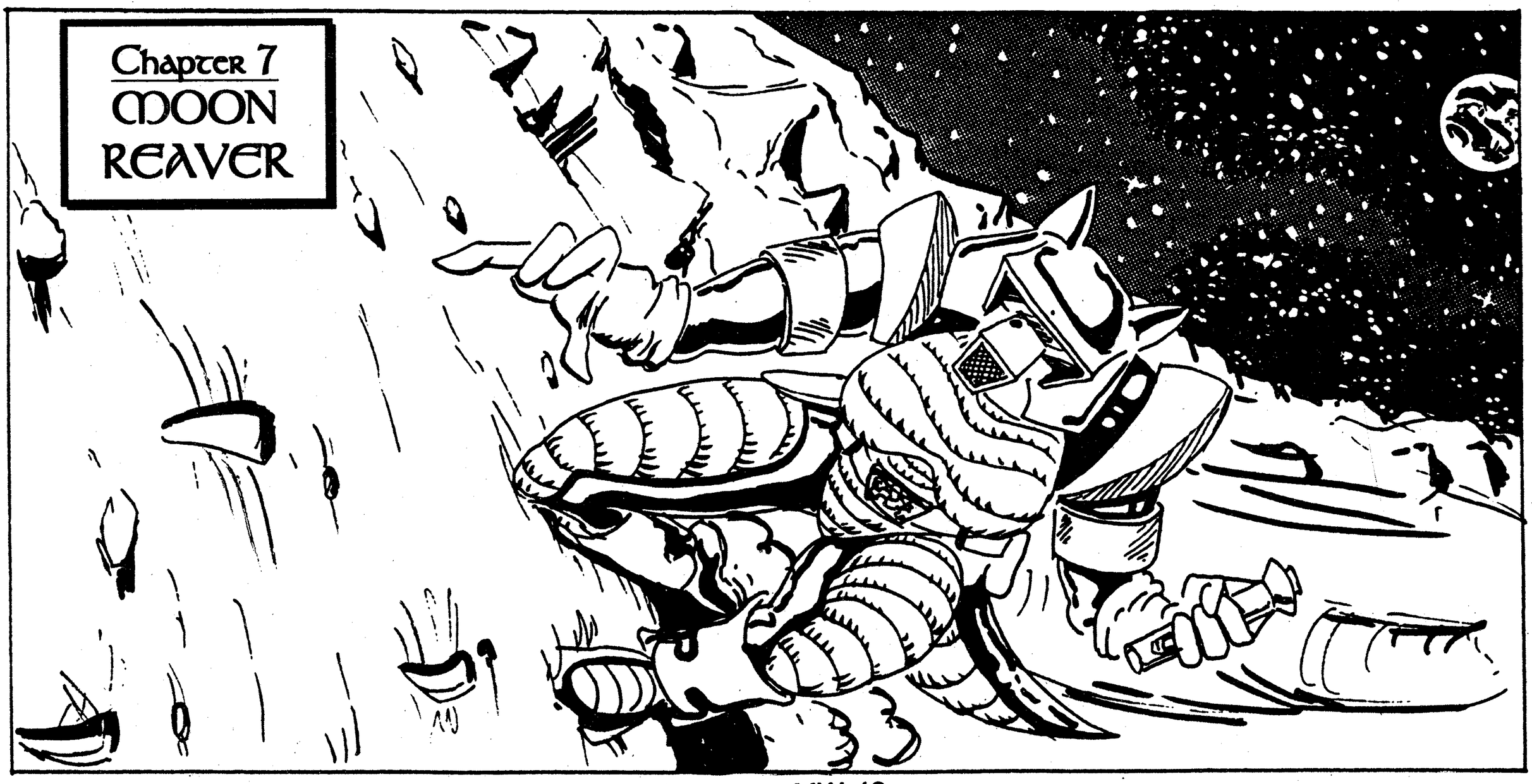
I'LL WATCH FOR YOUR RETURN COME HARVEST!

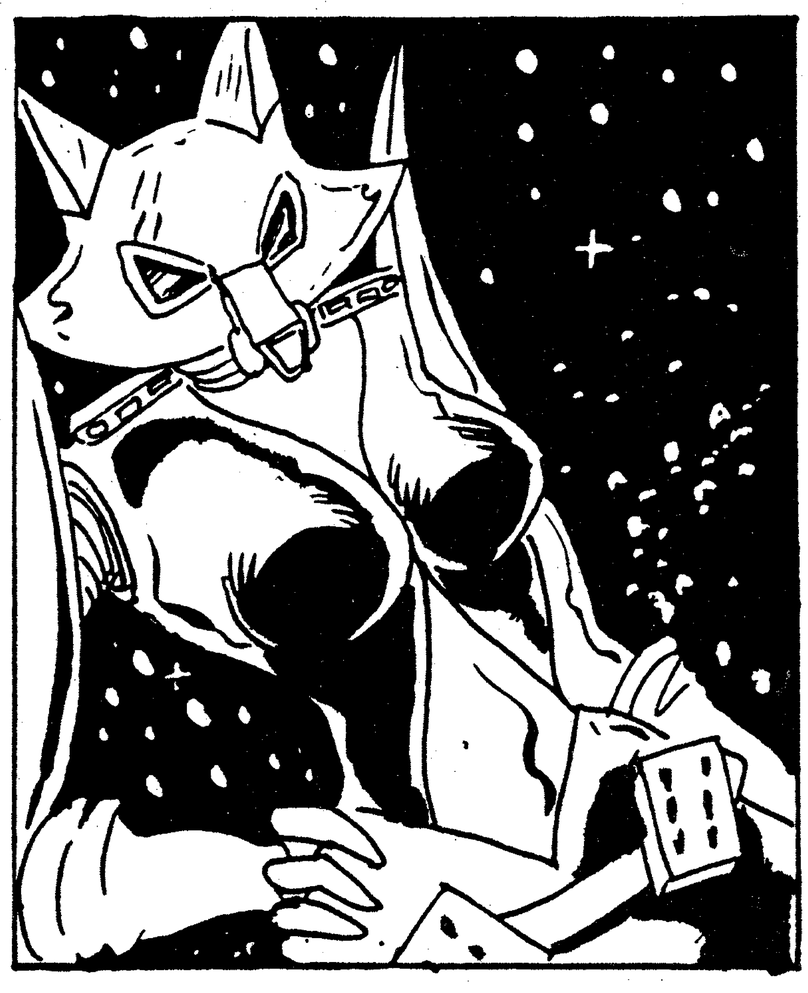
WELL, I DON'T SUPPOSE THAT THERE'S ANY NEED FOR US TO DAWDLE ANY LONGER...

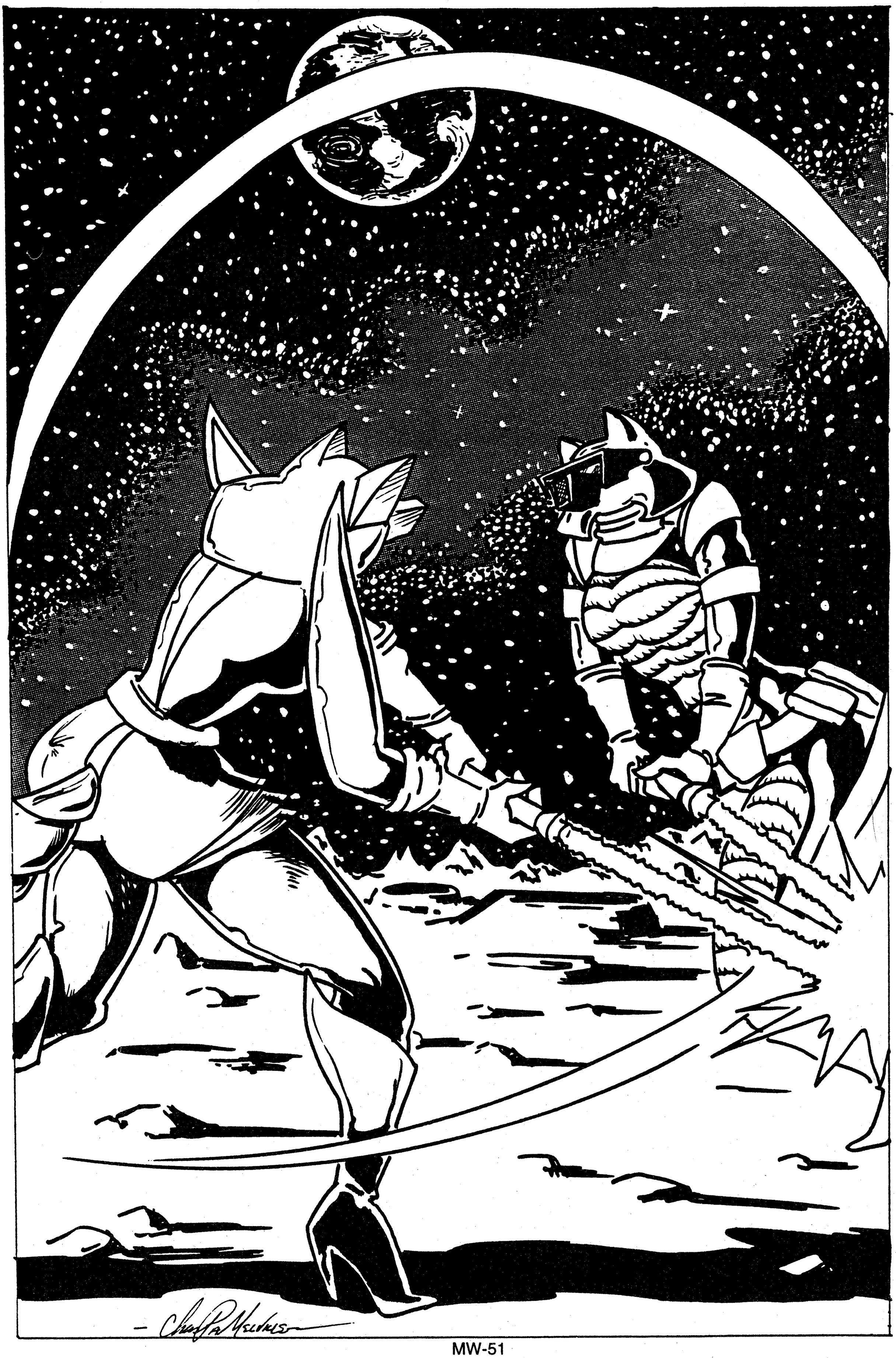
ARE WE READY?

THEN, LET'S GO!




Chapter 7
MOON
REAVER





MW-51

AH, YES!
VICTORIOUS ONCE MORE!
THIS SESSION IS FINISHED. YOU CAN GET UP NOW, FAREL!
(GASP) (GASP)

WHAT... (GASP) ...WHAT IN THE NAME O' GOOD QUEEN DAPHNE WAS THAT AWFUL PLACE!?

JUST AN ILLUSION...

TO THROW YOU OFF YOUR GUARD; AN ILLUSION OF THE MOON, IN FACT. STARK, LIFELESS, AND AWESOME. EXTREMELY DISTRACTING!

...WASN'T IT?

I'VE NIVIR SEEN THE LIKE...!

LET THIS BE YOUR FIRST LESSON, PUPIL: NEVER ALLOW YOURSELF TO BE DISTRACTED BY ANYTHING!

WHETHER IT BE TRIVIAL OR FANTASTIC, YOUR MIND MUST IGNORE ALL BUT YOUR FOE! THERE IS ONLY YOU AND YOUR TARGET!

HUH! IT WASN'T REALLY THE MOON!

EV'RYONE KNOWS THE MOON IS A PLACE O' WONDER, WITH ARANGE SKIES AN' DEEP MILK LAKES...

HMMM

...AN' BAT-WINGED FOLKS, WHO LIVE IN CASTLES O' DIAMONDS!

OH, YES, WELL, I SUPPOSE YOU COULD BE RIGHT...!

YOU TARRY OVERLONG IN THIS WORLD, MY LOST FRIEND...

WHAT HOLDS YOU TO THIS PLACE?

I SEE.

I AM SORRY, BUT I CANNOT HELP YOU. I AM ALREADY COMMITTED TO ANOTHER TASK...

...ROSE...

UM. ALL RIGHT, THEN. I SEE THAT THIS CANNOT BE AVOIDED.

I WILL DO WHAT I AM ABLE TO.

Pages are

BUT IT'S IRRELEVANT TO MY POINT: LET ANY-THING DISTRACT YOU IN A FIGHT, MY DEAR, AND YOU ARE DEAD!

COME; GATHER OUR THINGS TOGETHER. IT'S TIME THAT WE RETURNED TO OUR CAMP.

UM... I SEE YOUR POINT, WISOR. I WILL TRY TO FOCUS MY ATTENTION BETTER DURING MY NEXT SESSION...

HOLD STILL! DO YOU SEE IT?

WHAT...?

THERE!

BENEATH THAT TREE!

:gasp:

SACRED CANDLE!

Swapped

GO NOW TO YOUR REST, AND TARRY HERE NO MORE!

CANEL OST LARDISIL AB MOLACU KAZ... LARRIVIL MAE OS FFTLUG'S CORS!

FAREL! WATCH FOR AN AREA TO BEGIN GLOWING!

O... OVIR THIR! THOSE BUSHES!

AYE... THIR'S A BODY HIR... WHAT'S LEFT OF IT! A YOUNG LAD, I THINK... LOOKS TO HAVE BEEN STABBED FROM BEHIND, BUT I CANNOT BE SURE!

MURDERED. ON A NIGHT LIKE TONIGHT! KILLED BY MOONLIGHT!

WELL, WE'LL LEAVE HIM HERE FOR NOW; IN THE MORNING WE'LL RETURN TO GIVE HIM A PROPER GRAVE. SAY NOTHING TO THE OTHERS UNTIL DAYBREAK!

THIS IS NO MERE COINCIDENCE! THE CAUSE OF THIS BOY'S DEATH LIES AT OUR DESTINATION: BARON SWIFTY'S CASTLE!

LET'S RETURN NOW TO THE OTHERS.

..."ROSE"...?

SO THIS IS THE ANCESTRAL HOME OF BARON CLA DI SWIFTY.

Chapter 8
HOUSECALL

I DO NOT LIKE THE LOOKS OF THIS!

NO SERVANTS... NO SIGN OF ANYONE AT ALL... EVEN THE NEARBY LANDS ARE DESERTED.

THIS DAMAGE APPEARS TO BE VERY EXTENSIVE...

MY LORD BARON... WHAT HAVE YOU BEEN MEDDLING WITH?

THERE IS A MISCHIEF HERE!

I'D BEST WARN THE OTHERS AWAY...

FAREL! TAKE THE OTHERS BACK ABOUT ONE MILE FROM HERE...!

WAIT ONE HOUR FOR ME. IF I DO NOT RETURN IN THAT TIME...

DON'T COME LOOKING FOR ME!

(SIGH) ISN'T THIS ALWAYS THE WAY OF IT?

FIND A STONE, PRETTY AND SHINY... LIFT IT UP... AND SOMETHING UGLY SCAMPERS OUT!

HOW APPROPRIATE...

HE SAID YOU WERE LIKE THAT... DRIPPING WITH IRONY...

BARON SWIFTY, I PRESUME?

YOU'RE TOO LATE, YOU KNOW... IT'S ALL GONE NOW... ALL GONE...

WHAT HAS HAPPENED HERE?

I DIDN'T SEE IT COMING, YOU KNOW... IT ALL WENT WRONG... TERRIBLY, TERRIBLY WRONG...

YOU CAME FOR THE RING, DIDN'T YOU? HE SAID THAT YOU WOULD...

IT'S GONE NOW... GONE AWAY... FAR AWAY...

WHERE? WHERE IS IT?

I WAS A GREAT PERSON IN THESE LANDS... DID YOU KNOW THAT? AN OLD AND POWERFUL ONE, BUT I MOVED IN THE IMPORTANT CIRCLES...

I EVEN KNEW THE KING... PERSONALLY!

I WAS RICH AND INFLUENTIAL... IT WASN'T ENOUGH THOUGH... I STARTED AN ENTERPRISE... AND I DISCOVERED THERE WAS A DEMAND FOR IT... A VERY BIG DEMAND...

DO YOU KNOW... I HAD THE RING... AND I NEVER KNEW WHAT IT WAS? HEH, I DIDN'T KNOW A LOT OF THINGS, I SEE NOW...

...I GUESS IT WAS BECAUSE OF THE RING THAT I FOUND THE GUARDIAN... AND WITH IT I WAS ABLE TO CONTROL HIM... MAKE HIM DO WHAT I WANTED HIM TO DO...

...HE DIDN'T LIKE THAT...

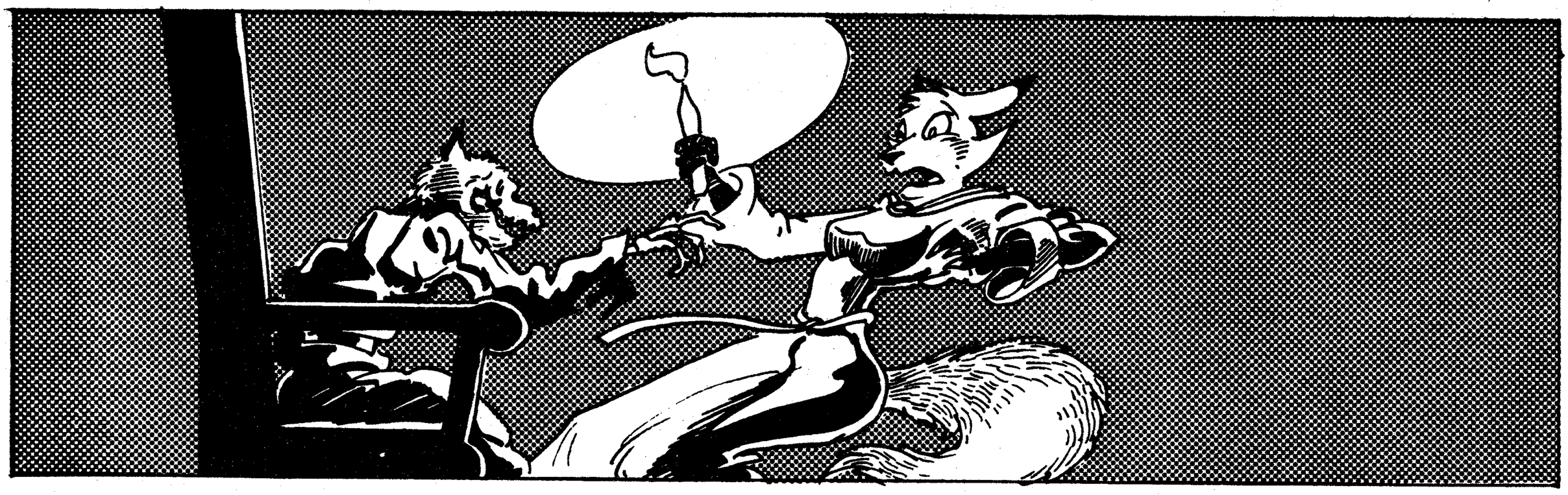
OH, YOU PEOPLE ARE SUCH FOOLS!

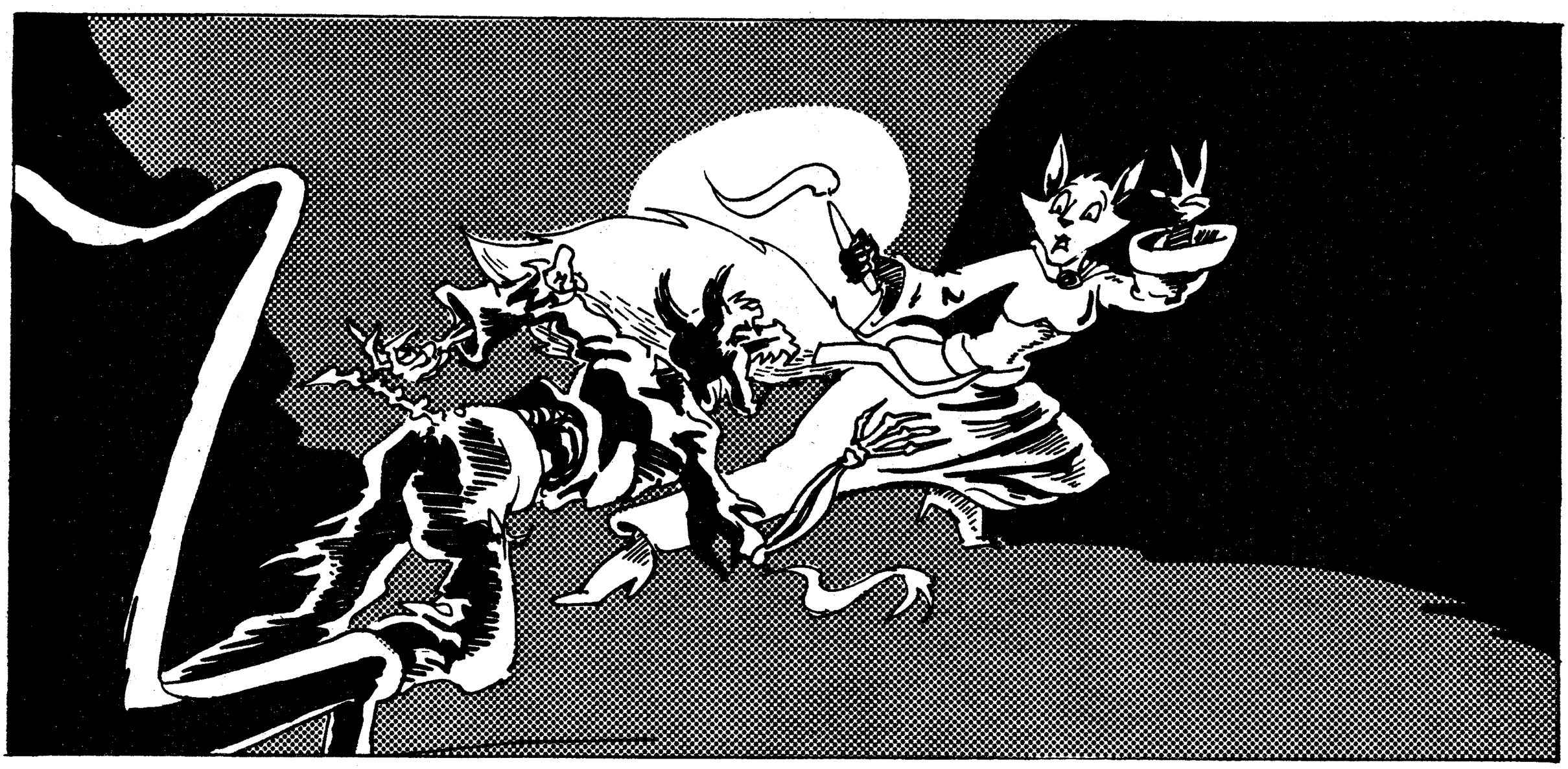
YOU ALL THINK THAT IF YOU HAVE SOME CHARM, THEN YOU CAN DO MAGIC!

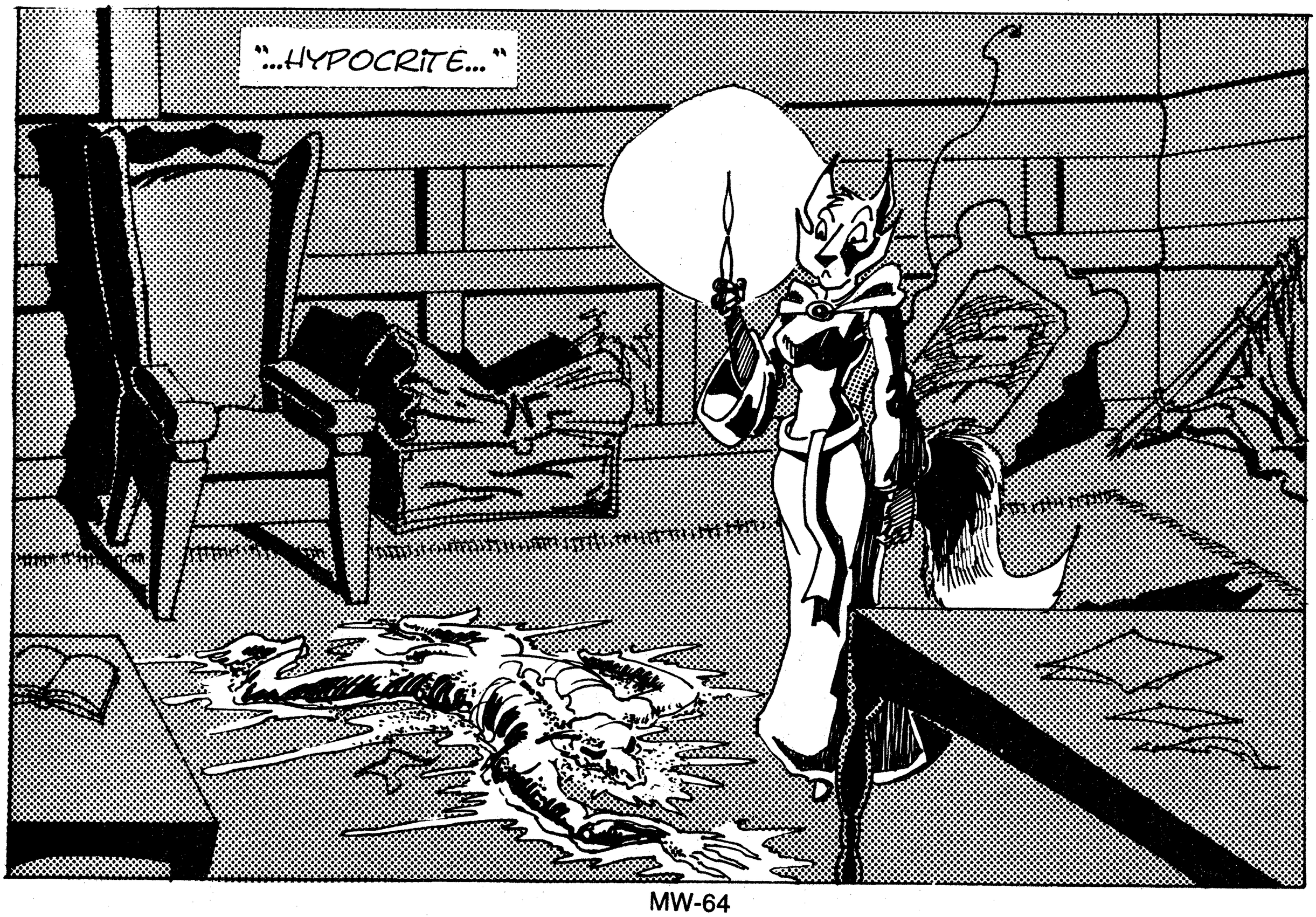
IT TAKES YEARS OF PRACTICE, AND OF PERCEPTION... AND A STRONG WILL TO PERFORM MAGIC!

...YES...

"HYPOCRITE!"






"...HYPOCRITE..."

FIRST INTERLUDE:
a long time ago...

thunk

A LITTLE MORE... I'M ALMOST THROUGH!

thunk

HOLD YOUR HANDS STEADY, FELICIA!

YES, MAMA!

thunk

WHEN THE DOOR OPENS, FELICIA, I WANT YOU TO RUN! RUN DOWN THE STAIRS, AS FAST AS YOU CAN RUN!

GO TO THE OLD CARETAKER'S SHED... HE WILL HIDE YOU UNTIL I CAN COME FOR YOU!

THERE! NOW TO BREAK MINE!

thunk

OH, SWEET ALN! I HEAR THEM COMING!!

REMEMBER WHAT I TOLD YOU, BABY!

YES, MAMA!

NOW, BABY! RUN!

RUN!

UHN!

MAMA!

...MAMA?

end of interlude

Chapter 9
HORSING AROUND

HOW LONG WE GOTTA SIT OUT HERE?

'TIL FOX SEZ WE C'N GO INTO TH' CASTLE!

NOW SHUT UP AN' PLAY!

AN' QUIT PEEKIN'!

WHATCHA GOT?

FOUR PAIRS!

HA!

I GOT DOUBLE-GIN!

AWWW!

WAIT A MINUTE! I GOT THREE HEARTS AN' A JACK O' LAMPS!

HUH?

THAT BEATS ANYTHING ON A WEDNESDAY!

HEY! WHERE'S DA PONIES!?

I WIN! I WIN!! I WIN!!!

YOUSE DUMMY! YA TIED DEM UP WIT' A GRANNY HITCH AGIN! NOW WE GOTTA GO AN' HUNT FER DEM BFORE DEY GETS LOST!

...BEFORE FOX AN' WOLF FIND OUT!!

BUT... WHAT ABOUT MY WINNIN'S...?

DADRAT IT! THIS ALLUS HAPPENS TO ME WHENEVER I'M WINNIN'...!

HEY! THAT'S ONE OF MY PACKS!

AWWWW...!

I MUST'VE TIED DOWN ALL TH' PACKS WITH A GRANNY HITCH, TOO!

BONK!

RATS!

NOW I'LL HAVETA PICK UP ALL MY STUFF AS WELL AS LOOK FOR TH' PONIES...!

HUH?

HEY! THIS IS A FUZZERINI STATUETTE! FOURTH AGE, I THINK...

WHAT'S THIS DOIN' WAY OUT HERE?

I SAW ONE OF THESE IN A BANALIAN MUSEUM, BEFORE WE ROBBED TH' PLACE!

LET ME SHINE 'ER UP A BIT...!

!

POOF

H1.O.

WHAT TH' HECK ARE YOU?

A MAGIC PONY!?

I'M A MAGIC PONY!

YUP.

GOSH!

SO... WHATTAYA DO?

I GRANT THREE WISHES.

GRANT THREE WISHES! WOW!

I GOT THREE WISHES! WOW!

I WISH I KNEW WHAT TO WISH FOR!

WELL...

WAIT A MINUTE! WAIT A MINUTE!

THAT WISH DIDN'T REALLY COUNT!

I WUZN'T READY!

I WUZ JUS' THINKIN' OUT LOUD!

NOW... LET ME THINK F'R A MINUTE...

BOY, I WISH I KNEW WHAT TO DO WITH YOU!

KEEP ME A SECRET UNTIL YOU'RE READY TO MAKE A WISH.

YEAH... THAT MAKES SENSE!

THAT'S ONE WISH.

HEY! NOW JUST A DOGGONE MINUTE...!

DOOFUS... YA FIND YER PONY YET? I FOUND MINE...

UH... YEAH! I FOUND 'IM! HE WAS GRAZIN' OVER HERE!

THAT DON'T LOOK LIKE YER PONY...!

SURE HE IS! THINK I DON'T KNOW MY OWN PONY?

NEVER MIND. C'MON, FOX SEZ WE C'N GO INTA TH' CASTLE NOW!

WHAT'D SHE FIND?

SHE WON'T SAY!

SO... WHERE'D YOU GET THIS PONY FROM?

Chapter 10
ROSE

NOTHING! NOT A BLESSED CLUE!

WHATEVER BEFELL BARON SWIFTY DESTROYED MOST OF HIS RECORDS - WE WERE VERY FORTUNATE TO FIND THESE HOUSE-KEEPING RECORDS INTACT...

BUT THEY STILL DON'T TELL US ANYTHING!

IT WAS MAGIC...

I'VE NIVIR SEEN SUCH DEVASTATION! WHAT COULD HAVE HAPPENED?

THE BARON WAS MEDDLING WITH A FORCE WE ARE NOT MEANT TO USE FOR OUR OWN ENDS!

HMMM. IN THIS CASE, MELARI, YOU ARE ENTIRELY CORRECT!

FAREL, YOU AND THE BROTHERS CONDUCT A SEARCH... GO ROOM TO ROOM, SEE WHAT YOU CAN FIND...!

AYE!

AND TAKE CARE!

I OWE THIS CASTLE STILL HAS A SECRET OR TWO... DANGEROUS ONES!

AND DON'T TOUCH ANY TREASURES YOU MIGHT FIND! THEY MAY BE BOOBY-TRAPPED WITH A CURSE!

LET ME EXAMINE THEM FIRST!

GOTCHA!

THIS PLACE...

IT MAKES ME UNEASY...

I AM CERTAIN THAT SOME THING STILL WATCHES IT!

I WISH TO BE GONE JUST AS QUICKLY AS I MAY!

IT MAY BE IMPORTANT!

OH! AND WATCH FOR ANY MARKINGS OR SIGNS OF A ROSE...

HMMM... ODD... SUCH HIGH SPENDINGS FOR MISCELLANEOUS COSTS... I WONDER WHY...?

WHAT IS SO IMPORTANT ABOUT A "ROSE" MARKING, MILADY?

	Servants	Guards	Land	Food	Maint.	Misc	Taxes
5th May	3F	7F	5F	16F	150F	200F	—
12th May	3F	7F	7F	16F	250F	400F	140F
19th May	3F	7F	6½F	18F			—
26th	4F	9F	5F	19F			170F

THE GHOST THAT FAREL AND I MET HAD SOME UNFINISHED BUSINESS HERE - SOMETHING THAT I FEEL SURE IS IN SOME WAY CONNECTED TO OUR QUEST!

HIS ONLY WORD TO US WAS "ROSE" SO WE SEARCH FOR SOME ITEM THAT IS MARKED BY THE SIGN OF A ROSE -

A SYMBOL, OR A RUNE PERHAPS...

MEANWHILE, I WANT TO KNOW WHAT THE BARON WAS UP TO HERE... THIS BOOK ONLY PUZZLES ME ALL THE MORE...

CLICK

LOOK! THERE WAS A BOOK HIDDEN IN A FALSE BOTTOM IN THE DESK DRAWER!

LET ME SEE!

HMMM... THIS IS ANOTHER HOUSEKEEPING BOOK!

YES, SEE? THESE TOTALS MATCH UP WITH THE MISCELLANEOUS COSTS IN THE FIRST BOOK!

THIS BOOK WAS HIDDEN IN CASE ROYAL TAX COLLECTORS CAME TO AUDIT HIS LANDS!

WHAT SORT OF BLACK MARKET WAS HE DEALING THAT HE WENT TO SUCH ELABORATION, I WONDER...

Records

HMMM...

THAT BASTARD!

WH... WHAT!?

SLAM!

IT'S NO SURPRISE HE'D KEPT THIS BOOK HIDDEN! IF THIS EVER GOT BACK TO THE KING, SWIFTY WOULD HAVE BEEN EXECUTED!

IF HE LIVED LONG ENOUGH TO FACE THE HANGMAN!

WHAT IS IT!? WHAT DOES IT SAY!?

HE WAS TRAFFICKING IN SLAVES!

IN DOGONIA!?

NO!

THERE IS A BLACK MARKET IN SLAVERY!

...AND SWIFTY WAS ITS LORD!

LOOK! SWIFTY DIVERTED A CERTAIN AMOUNT OF HIS FORTUNE TO THIS SECOND ACCOUNT, WHICH IS A HOUSEKEEPING RECORD OF FOOD, CLOTHING, AND OTHER ESSENTIALS...

...NOT COVERED IN THE FIRST BOOK!

...AND EVEN AT THAT, IT'S IN A CODE, SO THAT THE CASUAL READER MIGHT THINK IT WAS AN INNOCENT EXPENSE RECORD - BUT WHEN YOU READ IT CAREFULLY, YOU CAN SEE THAT IT PERTAINS TO THE CARE AND SELLING OF OTHERWISE UNRECORDED PERSONS!

WELL, I LOOKED IN TH' GARDEN AN' STABLES, AN' THEY'S ALL A MESS TOO! NO FLOWERS A'TALL, NOT EVEN ROSES!

WHAT WE'RE LOOKING FOR MIGHT BE AN ENGRAVING, OR AN HERALDIC DEVICE!

AIN'T SEEN NO ROSE HERE, THOUGH! NO PEOPLE EITHER, NOR ANIMALS NOR BIRDS!

HMMM.

SOMETHING EVIL HAS BEEN SET LOOSE HERE... WE SHOULD HURRY AND LEAVE...

BUT I'M STILL CONVINCED THERE WAS A PURPOSE TO THAT GHOST'S MESSAGE!

BUT WHY SHOULD IT HAVE TO DO WITH THE RING?

AN' HOWCUM YA CAN'T JUS' FIND IT WIT' A SPELL OR SUMTHIN'?

HMP! IT SHOULD BE SO EASY!

THE RING, LIKE THE WISHGEM PENDANT ITSELF, HIDES ITSELF FROM ALL FORMS OF DIVINATION! I WOULD "KNOW" IF IT WERE NEAR, BUT BE UNABLE TO TRACK IT WITH A SPELL!

AS FOR THE "ROSE"...

WELL, MY MAGE'S INSTINCTS TELL ME THAT IT...

EH?

SHUSH!

DO YOU HEAR THAT?

YEH! I HEARD IT TOO!

A SOFT SOUND... LIKE A SOB!

I DON'T HEAR...

IT'S COMING FROM THE LOWER LEVELS! FOLLOW ME - BUT TAKE CARE!!

WISOR! WE HAVE FOUND A SECRET DOOR, HIDDEN IN THIS WALL!

LET ME SEE!

SOMEONE'S CRYIN' ON TH' OTHIR SIDE!

GOT A GOOD LOCK, TOO!

THAT FOR YOUR LOCK!

CRACK

QUIETLY, NOW...!

(SOB)

(SOB)

(GASP)!
IT'S ALL RIGHT, CHILD! DON'T BE AFRAID!
OH, YOU POOR DEAR! WHAT HAVE THEY DONE TO YOU!

PLEASE D - DON'T HURT ME!
IT'S ALL RIGHT! WE'RE HERE TO HELP YOU!

(SOB)
IT'S ALL RIGHT! WE WON'T LEAVE YOU HERE! YOU'RE FREE NOW!!
YOU'RE WITH FRIENDS NOW!

WELL, WELL!

YOU MUST BE ROSE!

Chapter 11
THORNS

HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN KEPT HERE, ROSE?

ALL MY LIFE... SINCE MAMA DIED.

HAVE YOU NO FAMILY, THEN?

I DON'T KNOW... NEVER KNEW NOBODY BUT MAMA.

ROSE, CAN YOU TELL US WHAT HAS BEEN HAPPENIN' IN THESE HALLS?

YES... SOME... I CAN'T TELL ALL, 'CAUSE I DON'T KNOW ALL. I'VE BEEN CHAINED DOWN HERE FOR MONTHS.

WHY WOULD THEY DO THIS TO YOU?

'CAUSE OF TOBY.

TH' LORD... BARON SWIFTY... USED TO KEEP US HIDDEN AWAY IN HERE, IN TH' DUNGEON, WHERE VISITORS WOUN'T SEE US; BUT HE HAD FRIEN'S WHAT WOULD COME AN' BUY US TO DO SPECIAL JOBS ON THEIR LANDS...

"US"? WHO ELSE DID HE HAVE IMPRISONED?

OTHERS... ADULTS, SOME CHILDREN... ALL DOGS, LIKE ME...

AM I REALLY FREE NOW?

YES.

...SOMETHING EVIL WAS KEPT HERE, UNTIL IT BROKE LOOSE...

IT'S GONE NOW, ELSE I WOULD DETECT IT BY NOW. BUT WHERE HAS IT FLED?

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IT'S GONE NOW, ELSE I WOULD DETECT IT BY NOW. BUT WHERE HAS IT FLED?

I WAS LITTLE WHEN MAMA DIED... TH' LORD DIN'T WANT TO SELL ME YET, HE SAID...

"...SO THEY WOULD BRING ME OUT LATE AT NIGHT, TO SCRUB TH' FLOORS OF TH' GREAT HALLS, OR TO CLEAN UP IN TH' SCULLERY..."

I- I WAN'T ALLOWED TO SPEAK TO NO ONE, OR TO CRY... JUS' DO WHAT THEY TELL ME...

...WHAT SORT OF CREATURE COULD SWIFTY HAVE ENSLAVED INTO BECOMING HIS PERSONAL GUARDIAN? A VENGEFUL ONE, TO JUDGE BY THE DESTRUCTION WREAKED UPON THIS ESTATE! BUT HOW POWERFUL EXACTLY IS THE RING THAT HELD IT IN SWAY? NOT EVEN I KNOW FOR SURE... IS IT POWERFUL ENOUGH, FOR INSTANCE, TO CONTROL A WRAITH, OR A DEMON-THRALL? I DON'T KNOW! THERE'S JUST NOT ENOUGH INFORMATION, AND IT IRRITATES ME TO BE KEPT IN THE DARK LIKE THIS!

LET ME EXPAND MY MYSTIC WARDS...

NO... THE CASTLE AND GROUNDS ARE FREE OF ANY MALICIOUS PRESENCE...

...BUT I CAN FEEL SOMETHING JUST BEYOND MY SHIELDS...

...HIDING FROM MY PROBES... AND WATCHING US!

SOMETHIN' HAPPENED A FEW MONTHS AGO... I DON'T KNOW WHAT, BUT TH' LORD WAS VERY HAPPY 'BOUT IT - SAID HE WASN'T 'FRAID O' TH' KING, OR TH' MAGI NO MORE. AN' HE SAID HE WAS LOOKIN' FOR SOMEONE TO BUY ME - HE SAID THAT I WAS READY NOW. THAT MADE ME SAD, 'CAUSE I KNEW I WOULDN'T EVER SEE MY FRIEND, TOBY, ANYMORE...

"TOBY LIVED IN TH' CASTLE, THOUGH NOBODY KNEW HE WAS THERE. HE DIDN'T EVEN KNOW HIS MAMA; HE JUST TOOK WHAT HE NEEDED."

"HE SAW ME ONE NIGHT WHEN I WAS CLEANIN', AN' WE GOT TO BE FRIENDS. ...HE WAS MY ONLY FRIEND."

"WE COULDN'T MEET TOO OFTEN, 'CAUSE O' TH' GUARDS, BUT WE MANAGED TO FIND SOME TIME TO BE TOGETHER..."

BUT THAT'S WHEN IT ALL CHANGED! I GOT FEELIN' POORLY, AN' TH' LORD PUT ME IN HERE, 'TIL HE COULD SELL ME...

HE WAS MAD, AN' I DON'T KNOW WHY. HE WAS SHOUTIN' AN' YELLIN'...

"AN' I WAS ALL ALONE AGAIN, WITH NOBODY TO TALK TO."

"TOBY FOUND MY CELL, BUT HE COULDN'T OPEN IT. HE TOLD ME HE WOULD GO AND GET HELP, AN' SET ME FREE."

"I KNOW THAT HE WENT... I KNOW THAT TH' LORD FOUND OUT, AND SENT SOMEONE AFTER HIM..."

"I KNOW THAT HE NEVER CAME BACK... AN' I'M AFRAID... AFRAID THAT HE'S D - DE - "

ROSE... WE.. WE FOUND TOBY... HE... WAS KILLED...

OH, TOBY...! (SOB)

YES, THIS EXPLAINS A FEW THINGS! TOBY WAS SLAIN IN ORDER TO KEEP HIM SILENT ABOUT SWIFTY'S ILLICIT ENTERPRISE...

...BUT TOBY'S SPIRIT WOULD NOT REST UNTIL HE COULD FIND AID FOR ROSE! THAT'S WHY WE SAW HIS GHOST IN THE HILLS!

SWIFTY'S EXCITEMENT EARLIER WAS PROBABLY DUE TO HIS ACQUIRING THE RING AND GAINING CONTROL OVER HIS "GUARDIAN", THOUGH HE'D NEVER EVEN REALIZED THE CONNECTION BETWEEN THEM... UNTIL IT WAS TOO LATE!

SOMEHOW, HE LOST CONTROL, AND THE GUARDIAN TURNED UPON HIM!

BUT HOW? WHY? WHAT WAS THIS CREATURE?

I HEARD IT!

...IT WAS ANGRY, AN' IT ROARED SO LOUD THAT IT SHOOK TH' WALLS! I COULD HEAR IT BREAKIN' DOWN TH' WALLS, AN' TH SCREAMS OF TH' SERVANTS AN' NOBLES AS IT KILLED THEM...

...IT HISSED AS IT SHAMBLED DOWN TH' CORRIDORS... IT STOPPED OUTSIDE MY DOOR, AN' I COULD FEEL TH' HEAT OF IT'S BREATH... AN' I WAS AFRAID...

BUT IT MOVED ON, AN' THERE WAS MORE NOISE AN' SCREAMIN'... AN' I SAW FLICKERS OF LIGHT AN' HEAT UNDER TH' DOOR... UNTIL IT GREW DARK... AN' QUIET...!

GOOD GUR! COULD IT BE?

I NEVER THOUGHT... NEVER REALIZED...!

WISOR? WHAT IS IT?

IT'S STILL NEARBY! WE'RE NOT SAFE HERE! WE MUST FLEE, QUICKLY!

O GREAT ALN! WHY DIDN'T I SEE IT BEFORE!?

MELARI! HELP ROSE TO RUN AS BEST AS SHE IS ABLE!

QUICKLY, FAREL! FIND THE BROTHERS RIGHT AWAY! TELL THEM TO PACK AND SCURRY!

WE ARE FLYING BACK TO THE HILLS WHILE WE ARE STILL ABLE!

Chapter 12
PANGS

WHAT DO YOU MEAN, SHE'S PREGNANT!?

...THERE WASN'T TIME TO EXAMINE HER EARLIER... YOU WERE IN A HURRY FOR US TO FLEE THE CASTLE...

AND WE CAN'T STOP NOW TO DELIVER A BABY!! THAT... THING IS STILL NEARBY!

BUT SHE WAS WEAK AND ILL, AND I WAS SUSPICIOUS, SO I EXAMINED HER AS SOON AS I COULD!

SNIFF I'M SORRY! I DIDN'T KNOW!

OF ALL OF THE THINGS TO HAVE TO OCCUR NOW! GREAT GUR!!

HOW COULD YOU NOT KNOW!?!

MILADY... FELICIA... ROSE IS STILL A CHILD HERSELF. SHE WAS KEPT ISOLATED, HER MOTHER WAS DEAD...

THERE SIMPLY WAS NO ONE TO TELL HER ABOUT SUCH THINGS!

SHE IS INNOCENT AND IGNORANT... IT IS NOT KIND TO BLAME HER FOR HER CONDITION. ...NOR IS IT ALL THAT UNCOMMON... UNFORTUNATELY.

FELICIA... THE SITUATION IS EVEN MORE SERIOUS...

HER TREATMENT THESE PAST FEW YEARS HAS NOT BEEN GENTLE...

SHE'S VERY WEAK AND UNDERNOURISHED... SHE'S BEEN VERY ILL, AND IS IN VERY POOR HEALTH... AND THE BABY...

...THE BABY IS IN THE WRONG POSITION...

...IT'S GOING TO BE A VERY DIFFICULT DELIVERY.

I'M AFRAID FOR BOTH OF THEM.

VERY WELL, MELARI... YOU ARE MORE KNOWLEDGEABLE WITH MEDICINES... PREPARE WHAT YOU NEED, AND I WILL ASSIST YOU.

(SIGH)

DAMN.

WE HAVE NO TIME FOR THIS DELAY! EVERY MINUTE WE SIT HERE, WE SINK DEEPER INTO DANGER!

BUT IT CANNOT BE HELPED... WE CANNOT MOVE UNTIL ROSE HAS HER BABY! ALL I CAN DO IS STRENGTHEN THE PROTECTIVE WARDS AND HOPE THAT THEY ARE STRONG ENOUGH!

DOOLEY, I NEED MY KIT, THE ONE WITH ALL MY HERBS; I MAY NEED FOR YOU TO FETCH ME SOME FRESH HERBS AS WELL!

DOOFUS... I'LL NEED SOME FRESH WATER HEATED RIGHT AWAY!

GOTCHA!

ALN GUIDE MY HAND IN WHAT MUST BE DONE TONIGHT!

LADY...

I... I'M AFRAID...

REST WHILE YOU CAN, CHILD, AND DON'T BE FRIGHTENED. I'M SORRY THAT I YELLED AT YOU EARLIER; I WASN'T REALLY ANGRY WITH YOU! EVERYTHING WILL BE FINE!

I'VE... I'VE NEVER DONE THIS BEFORE...

AN' I AM SCARED! IT HURTS, AN' I FEEL SO SICK...

I'M ONLY 15, AN' I AIN'T NEVER DONE ANYTHIN' IN MY LIFE...

LADY...

AM I GOING TO DIE?

NO...

NO, OF COURSE NOT...

EEEEAAAAAAHHHH!

THE BABY IS COMING OUT BACKWARDS! OH, I DON'T KNOW IF I CAN HANDLE THIS DELIVERY PROPERLY!

IS THERE NO WAY TO TAKE ROSE TO A VILLAGE? YOU USED MAGIC TO MAKE A DOORWAY TO THE SEA...

I HAD OVER A WEEK TO PREPARE THAT SPELL! AND I NEED MY MAGIC TO PROTECT US ALL!

OOOHHH!

WE'RE HERE, ROSE!

I CAN EASE HER SUFFERING A LITTLE, AT LEAST...

I CAN FEEL IT COMIN'! LADY! OHH! IT HURTS!

ROSE!

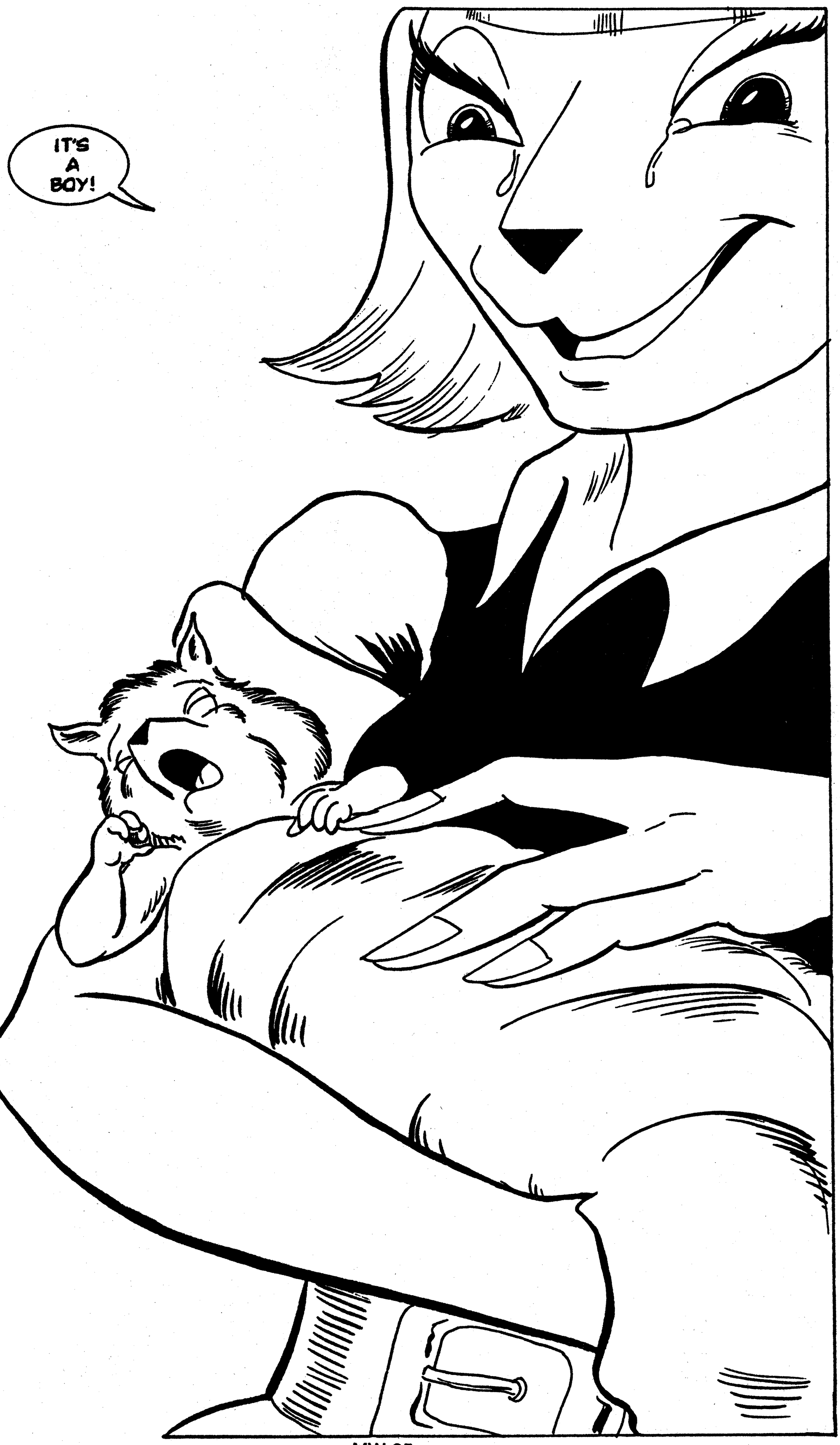
STAY WITH ME NOW! LOOK! LOOK TOWARDS THE CANDLE!

ROSE...?

***WAHHHH!

....EVERYBODY...

...COME AND SEE!



MW-95

WE WILL NEED MILK. DOOLEY, THERE WAS A FARM TWO MILES WEST OF HERE... GO THERE AND FETCH US A COW.

HUH? BUT...

THE WARDS WILL PROTECT YOU; GO!

FAREL... I'M AFRAID I HAVE AN UNPLEASANT TASK FOR YOU. WE'LL NEED A GRAVE DUG.

THERE IS A PLACE NEAR THE STREAM... WE WILL BURY ROSE THERE.

THIS BUSINESS HAS WORN ME OUT. I MUST BE ALONE TO MEDITATE FOR A SPELL.

"YOU DIDN'T SEE! SPELL AFTER SPELL SHE CAST, BUT NOTHING SHE DID COULD KEEP ROSE FROM PASSING ON; THE POOR CHILD WAS TOO WEAK. COLD-HEARTED? IF YOU'D SEEN FELICIA AS I DID JUST A FEW MINUTES AGO, YOU'D NOT HAVE SAID THAT!"

MEDITATE? WHY, THAT COLD-HEARTED BITCH! TH' PUR CHILD DIES TO HAVE HIR BABY, AN' SHE WANTS TO TAKE A STROLL!

NO, FAREL! YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND!

"IT IS ONLY HER PRIDE THAT MAKES HER APPEAR SO COLD!"

Chapter 13
TWO NINNIES AND A NANNY

NO COWS IN HERE!

IN FACT, DEY AIN'T NO CHICKENS, NO HORSES... DEY AIN'T NOBODY HERE!

WONDER WHERE ALL THE FARM PEOPLE ARE?

NOOOOO...

DID'JA LOOK IN TH' PASTURES?

WELL, MEBBE DAT'S WHERE DA COWS ARE!

MEBBE... LET'S HAVE A LOOKSEE!

WHY'D YOU BRING DAT DOPEY PONY WIT' US?

HEY, THAT'S MY MAGIC WISHIN' PONY!

DEN WHY DON'T YOU WISH FER A COW?

'CAUSE I'M SAVIN' MY WISHES!

RIGHT.

HECK. DA PASTURE'S EMPTY, TOO!

WE NEVER HAD DESE PROBLEMS IN DA CITY!

WHERE'D ALL THOSE COWS GO, ANYWAY?

FOX SEZ GET A COW... IF WE WUZ BACK IN MASQUE, WE COULDA ROBBED DA SLAUGHTERHOUSE!

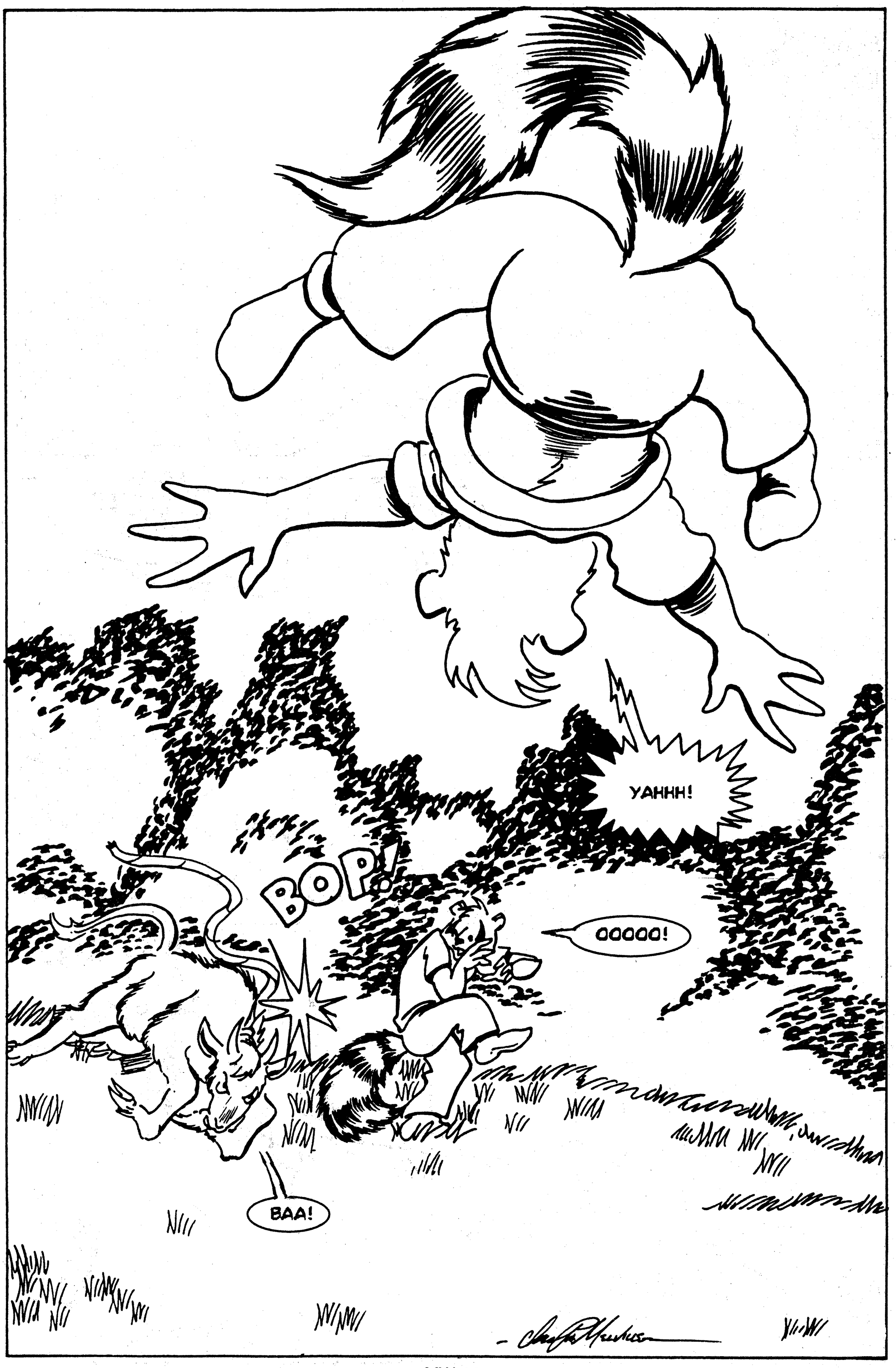
'FORE OR AFTER?

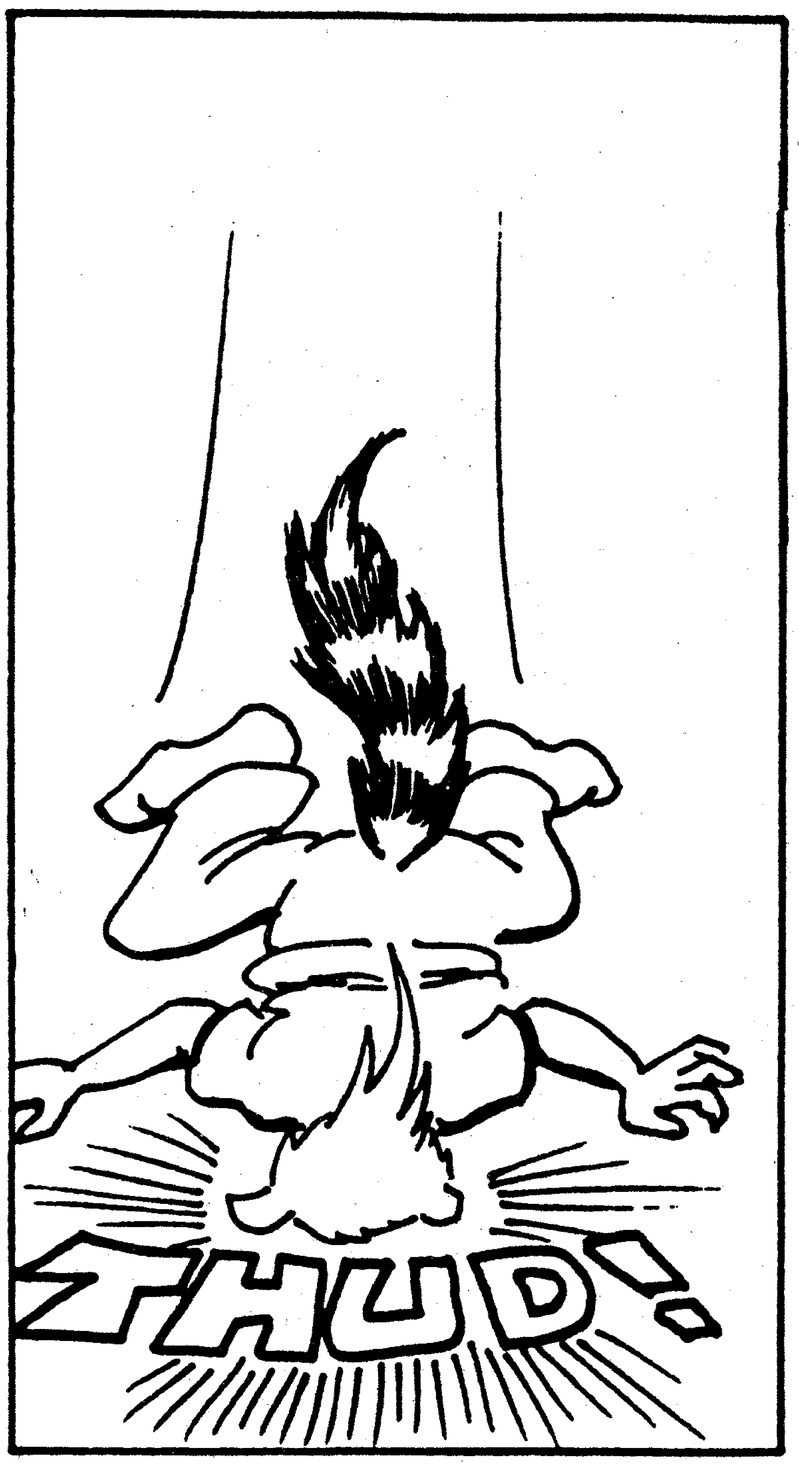
HEY! DERE'S A COW! MUSTA BEEN HIDIN' ON DA OTHER SIDE OF DA HILL!

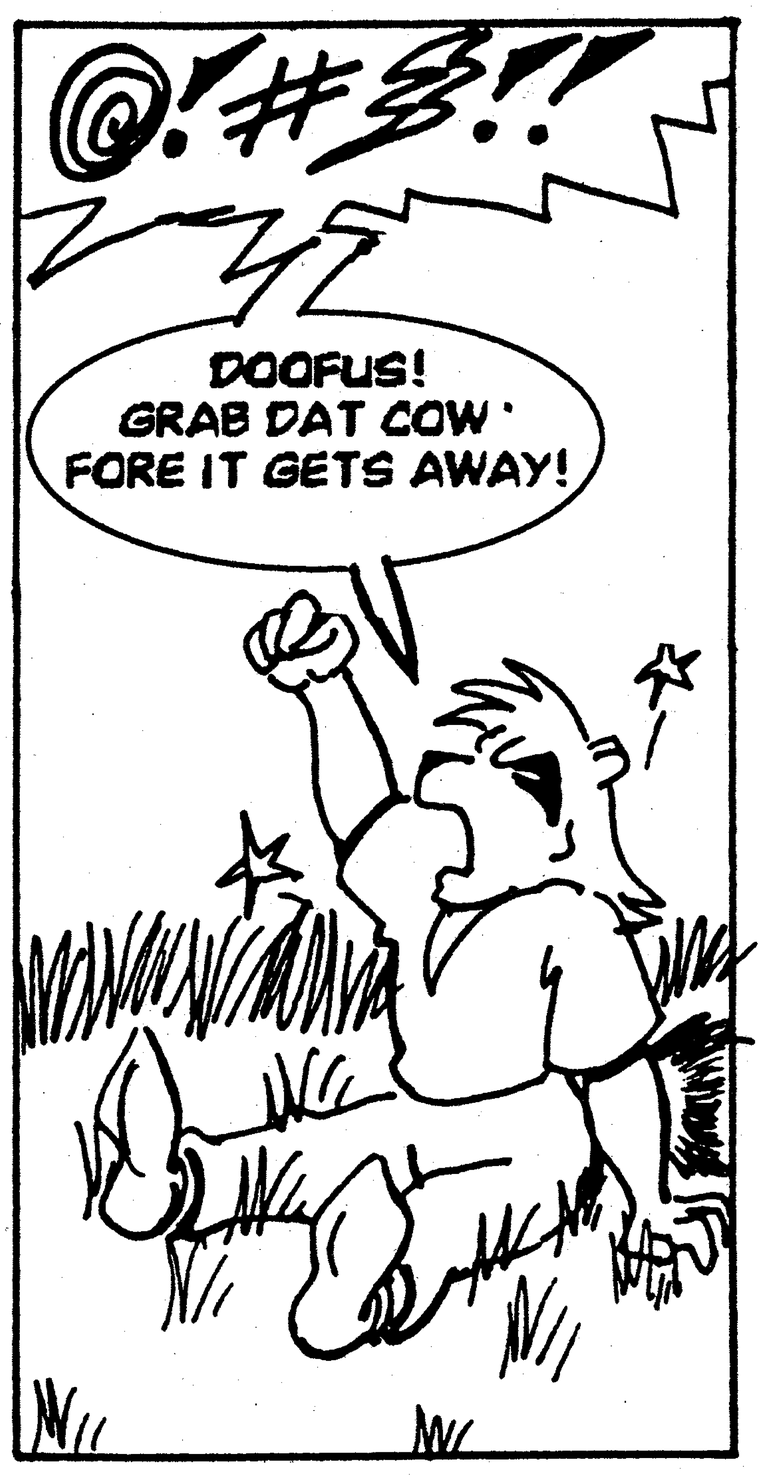
GREAT! LET'S GRAB IT AN' GET BACK TO LADY FOX!

C'MON, COWSY! WE GOTTA NICE CUSHY JOB FER YA!

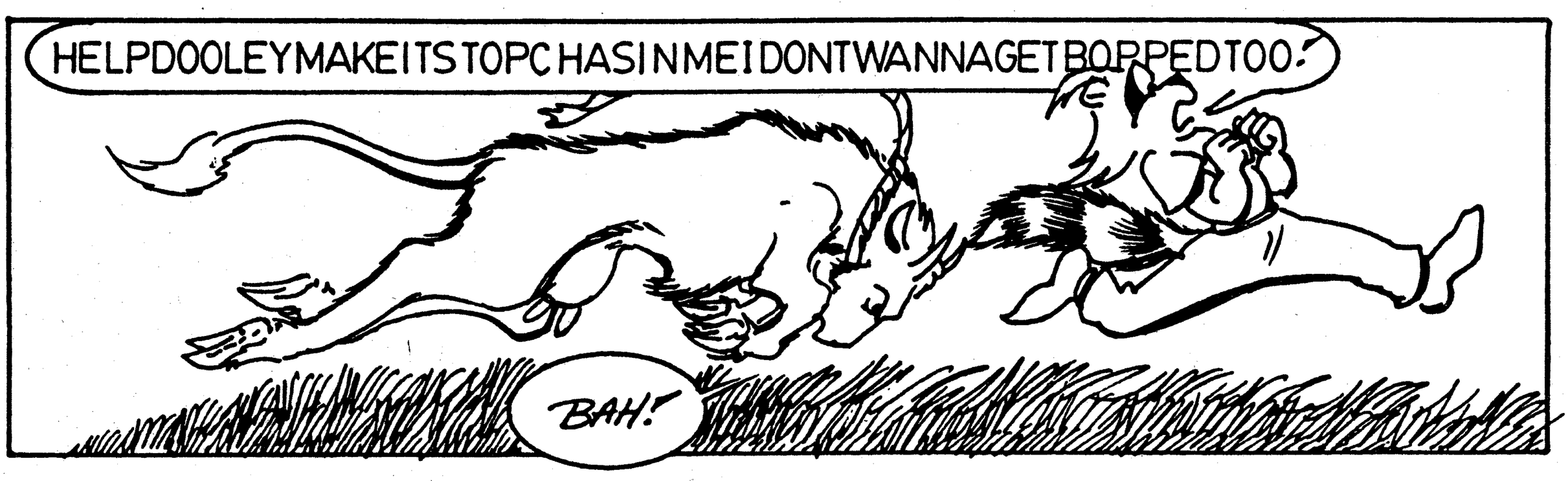
URK!

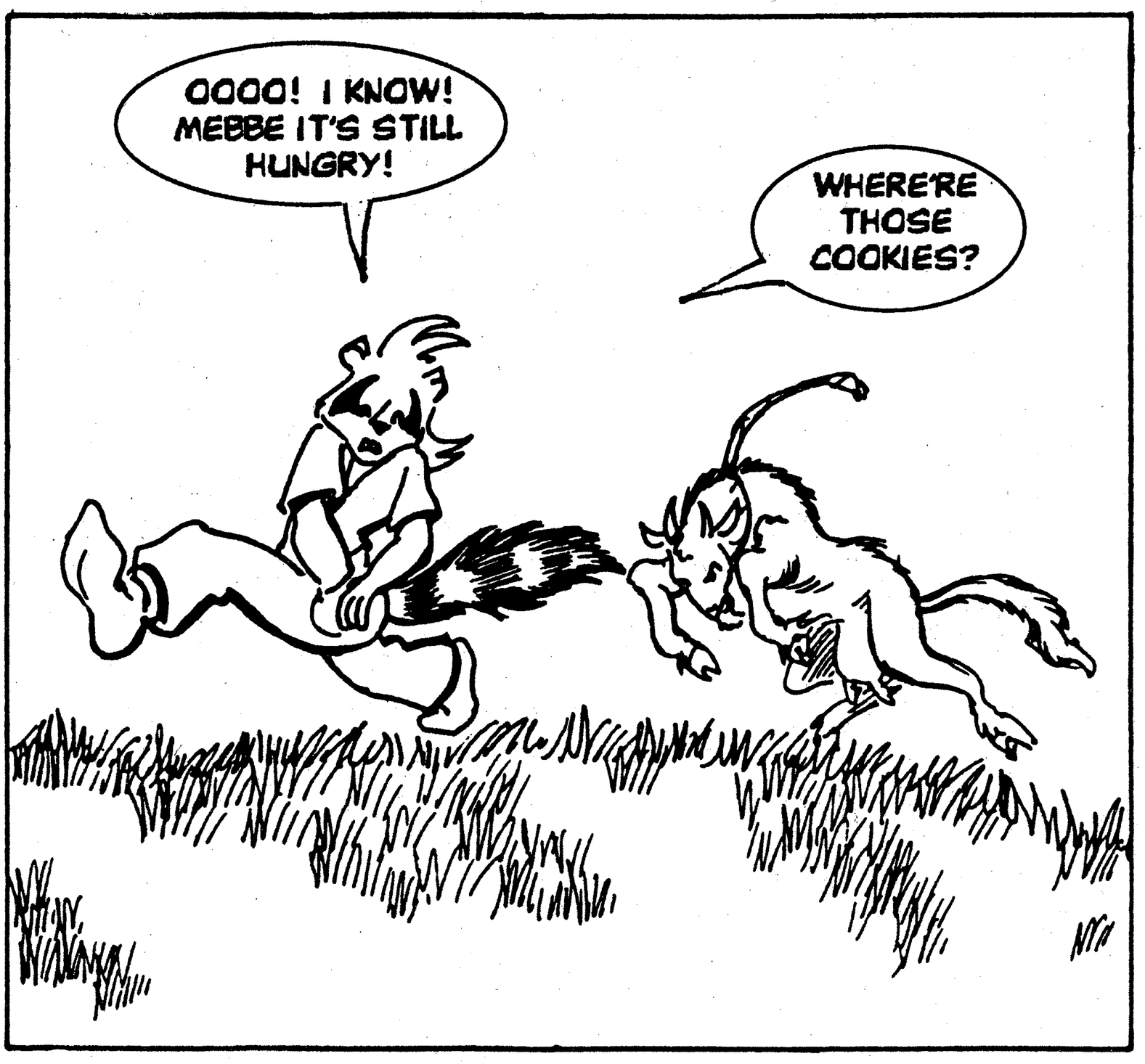

YAHHH!
BOP!
OOOOO!
BAA!

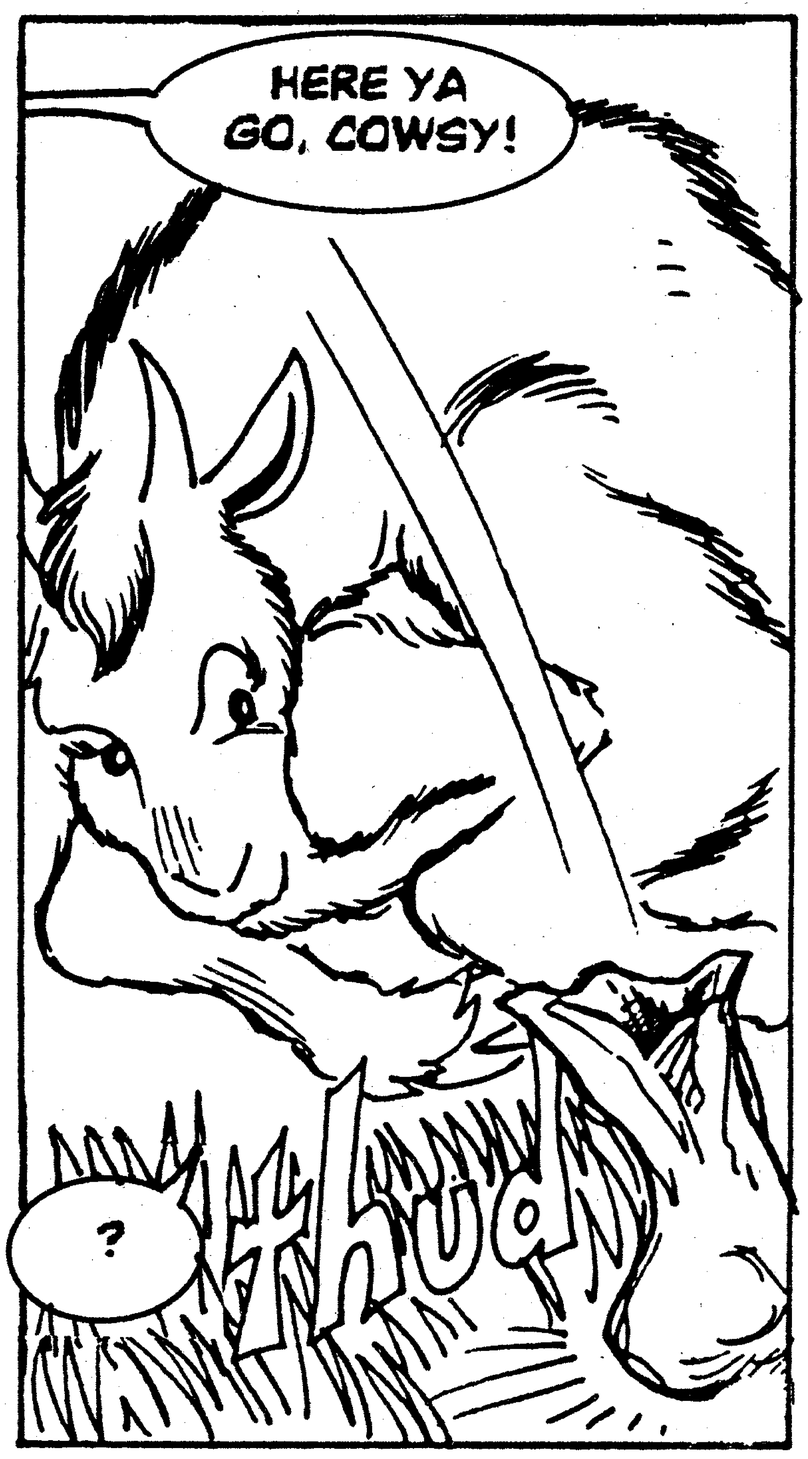

THUD!


@!#$!!
DOOFUS!
GRAB DAT COW
FORE IT GETS AWAY!

S'OKAY, DOOLEY...
I GOT 'IM!
NIIIIICE
COWSY!
snort


HELPDOOLEYMAKEITSTOPCHASINMEIDONTWANNAGETBOPPEDTOO!
BAH!


OOOO! I KNOW!
MEBBE IT'S STILL
HUNGRY!
WHERE'RE
THOSE
COOKIES?


HERE YA
GO, COWSY!
?
THUD!

SNIFF

HAH! GOOD THINKIN', DOOFUS!

NIBBLE NIBBLE MUNCH

NOBODY CAN RESIST BRAZZLEBERRY COOKIES!

MUNCH MUNCH MUNCH

NOW WE TAKE IT BACK TO FOX AN' RABBIT!

...AN' WOLF, TOO!

HEY, AIN'T THIS KINDA SMALL FER A COW?

BEATS ME... HOW BIG DO THEY GET?

I DUNNO... I AIN'T NEVER SEEN ONE IN DA CITY...

HOW DO WE KNOW THIS IS REALLY A COW?

AW, C'MON... WHUT'S A COW LOOK LIKE?

WELL... THEY GOT HORNS...

WELL, SO DOES THIS!

YEAH...

AN' A COW'S GOTTA MILK BAG, RIGHT?

YEAH...

AN' DIS HAS GOT A MILK BAG... SEE?

AIN'T THAT AN UDDER?

NO, NO!

ANUDDER WHAT?

I MEAN, AIN'T THAT CALLED AN UDDER?

NAW...

AN UDDER IS A LONG-BODIED CRITTER, KINDA LIKE A WEASEL, ONLY IT LIKES SWIMMIN'!

OH.

BUT DON'T COWS GOT BIG SPOTS ON THEIR BACKS, OR SOMETHIN'?

NAW... ONLY WHEN DEY GOT DA MOOSLES.

OH.

HEY! DERE'S DA BABY COW! WE BETTER TAKE 'IM WITH US!

WHADDYA CALL A BABY COW, DOOLEY?

UMM... A KID.

MAA!

BAA!

WELL, SURE IT'S A KID! IT'S ONLY JUST A BABY!

BUT WHAT DO YOU CALL A BABY COW?

...NEVER MIND...

Y'KNOW, I STILL DON'T UNNERSTAN'...

HOWCUM WE GOTS TA GET A COW?

WELL, WE GOTTA HAVE SOME MILK... YOU KNOW, FOR DA LITTLE BABY!

YEAH, BUT, I KINDA THOUGHT...

WELL, YOU KNOW... THAT TH' MOTHER KINDA MADE HER OWN MILK FOR TH' BABY...

WHAD'VE YOU BEEN DOIN', SLEEPIN' ALL DAY?

DA BABY DON'T GOT A MOTHER, REMEMBER?

SHE DIED WHEN DA BABY WUZ BORN!

...SHE DIED...?

I DIDN'T KNOW SHE WUZ DEAD... I DIDN'T KNOW THAT SHE WUZ THAT SICK!

I... I COULD'VE MADE HER GET BETTER! I COULDA MADE A WISH!

NO.

SOME THINGS EVEN I CANNOT ALTER. THE GIRL'S DESTINY WAS ALREADY SET.

BUT I WOULD'VE WISHED IT!

...I JUST DIDN'T KNOW THAT SHE WUZ SO SICK...

SLEEP.

Z

Z

SECOND INTERLUDE:
a few weeks ago...

...SO I FOLLOWED HER TO THIS INN, WHERE SHE MET AGAIN WITH THE SORCERESS!

THREE DAYS LATER, THEY SET OUT TOWARDS RA KUNA WITH TWO RAKUNES AND THE INNKEEPER'S WIFE!

SHE KNOWS.

DAMN HER SOUL... SHE *KNOWS*!

?? ...SIR?

YOU WERE CORRECT TO COME TO ME WITH THIS NEWS, KNI JAKAL!

I HAVE HAD... DEALINGS... WITH THIS SORCERESS BEFORE!

OUR FEUD GOES BACK MANY, MANY YEARS. I HAD HOPED, IN RECENT YEARS, THAT SHE MIGHT HAVE FORGIVEN...

...AND DECIDE TO FORSAKE OUR QUARREL.

NOW I SEE THAT SHE HAS NOT.

THIS TIME, THE STAKES ARE TOO DEAR FOR ME TO TAKE CHANCE WITH.

I CALL UPON MY SECRET, MY LAST DESPERATE HOPE!

I HAVE COME, LORD BARON...

AND I ALREADY KNOW WHAT IT IS THAT YOU DESIRE. IF IT MAY BE DONE, THEN I SHALL DO SO...

...BUT KNOW THAT THIS IS THE LAST WISH THAT I MAY GRANT YOU!

I UNDERSTAND. I ONLY PRAY THAT YOU ARE AS SUCCESSFUL AS YOU WERE THE PAST TWO WISHES!

(GASP)!

I WILL HAVE NEED, I FORESEE, OF THIS GOOD KNIGHT. I WILL CARRY HIM TO THE SORCERESS.

BUT FIRST, I MUST ASK YOU AGAIN... WILL YOU FORGIVE ME?

TWICE BEFORE YOU HAVE ASKED ME THIS... AND ONCE MORE I TELL YOU THAT I CANNOT, UNLESS YOU TELL ME WHAT YOU HAVE DONE THAT REQUIRES FORGIVENESS.

?

...I UNDERSTAND.

"THEN LET YOUR KNIGHT MAKE READY, FOR WE HAVE A LONG RIDE BEFORE US!"

HERE IS WHERE THE SORCERESS PROWLS, POKING THROUGH THE RUINS. SOMETHING EVIL HAS BEEN HERE, AND SHE SEEKS KNOWLEDGE OF IT.

IS THIS HER DOING?

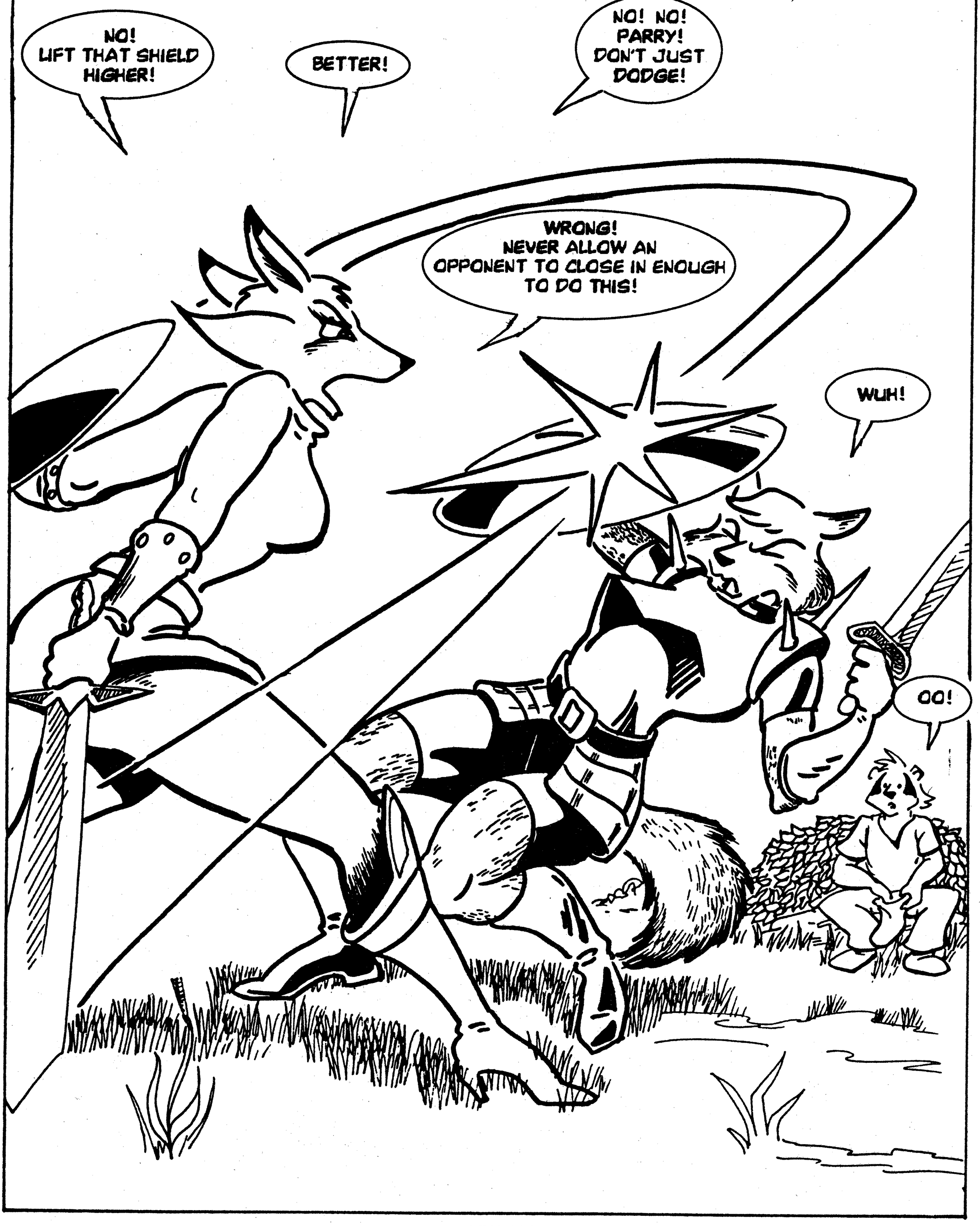
NO. THIS WAS UNEXPECTED BY HER. IT IS ALSO BEYOND HER STRENGTHS OF WILL. HERE WE MUST PART, GOOD KNIGHT... HOLD SECURELY TO THAT WHICH WE FOUND... YOU WILL HAVE NEED OF IT SOON ENOUGH.

LISTEN CAREFULLY NOW TO MY INSTRUCTIONS...

"YOU MUST SET ME ALONG THE ROADSIDE, WHERE I MAY BE FOUND... FOR IT IS MY DOOM TO SERVE YET ANOTHER, AND TO GRANT HIM ALSO THREE WISHES."

"BUT YOU NEED HAVE NO FEAR OF ME, FOR I MUST STILL PROTECT THE BARON'S GREATEST TREASURE, AS I HAVE BEEN COMMANDED."

Chapter 14
CROSS PURPOSES



AND ONCE AGAIN, YOU'RE DEAD!

WILL YOU NEVER MASTER EVEN THESE SIMPLE MANEUVERS?

I... I'M TRYIN'...

A FIGHTER SHOULD DO MORE THAN JUST *"SLICE AND DICE"...!*

I SAID I'M TRYIN'! BUT YOU DON'T GIVE ME TIME... TIME TO LIRN, TO MEMARIZE... TO REST! YOU JUST PUSH, PUSH, PUSH!

"TIME" IS A LUXURY WE DON'T POSSESS. IF YOU'RE TO BE OF ANY USE TO ME, YOU MUST BE GOOD NOW!

I NEED AN EXPERIENCED SWORD TO SUPPORT ME... OR WE MAY ALL WIND UP DEAD!

YOU'VE BEEN PUSHIN' ME THE PAST TWO DAYS, SINCE ROSE DIED, AN' I WON'T BE – !

YOU WILL BE!

YOU WILL PRACTICE AND LEARN UNTIL YOU CAN MOVE THAT SWORD AS EASILY AS YOU WAG YOUR TAIL... UNDERSTAND?

(AHEM)
PERHAPS I MIGHT
BE OF ASSISTANCE?

WHA...?
YOU!

HUH!
IT'S ABOUT TIME
YOU SHOWED YOURSELF!

MILADY, AS FAREL
HERSELF WILL VOUCH,
I AM kni JAKAL, A KNIGHT
IN SERVICE TO HIS LORDSHIP,
BARON cla di HOWLER,
AND I JUST...

...AND YOU'VE BEEN SENT
TO KEEP AN EYE ON ME.
NO, SAVE YOUR FICTION, kni JAKAL;
I FULLY EXPECTED THE BARON TO
SEND SOMEONE.

IN FACT,
I'D COUNTED UPON IT!
BUT THE SITUATION HAS
BEEN CHANGED!

COME WITH ME!
WE HAVE MUCH
TO DISCUSS!

YOU EXPECTED ME, LADY SORCERESS?

NOT YOU SPECIFICALLY, BUT SOMEONE OR ANOTHER. THE "GAME" THE BARON AND I PLAY IS AN OLD AND DEADLY ONE!

NOW... WHAT DO YOU KNOW?

I HAVE SEEN THE CASTLE... RUINS AND DESTRUCTION, AND NO INHABITANTS... NO ONE FOR MILES AROUND; I'VE SCOUTED THE AREA.

NO GAME OR LIVESTOCK... ALL FLED... OR DEAD.

AND WHAT DOES THIS TELL YOU?

SOMETHING EVIL HAS BEEN SET LOOSE... MOST LIKELY FROM FUNGOR, THOUGH I KNOW NOT WHAT...

VERY GOOD!

BUT YOU HAVE NOT TAKEN YOUR OBSERVATIONS FAR ENOUGH! THE CASTLE WAS SCOURED BY INTENSE FLAME, THE FURNITURE CAST ASIDE LIKE TOYS...

AYE... AND I SAW CLAW MARKS THROUGHOUT THE CASTLE... AND FOOTPRINTS IN THE SOFT EARTH OUTSIDE, HUGE AND DEEP... THE MORE I THINK ON IT, THE LESS I LIKE THE IMPLICATIONS...

IMPLICATIONS? NO, SIR JAKAL, I'M AFRAID IT'S TRUTH!

I WAS ON A SIMPLE QUEST ERE NOW, WHICH FIT NEATLY INTO MY OWN SCHEMES...

BUT NOW WE ARE ALL IN DEADLY DANGER, AND YOU AND I MUST UNITE IN ORDER FOR US ALL TO SURVIVE!

YOU HAVE NO DOUBTS?

NONE!

WE FACE ONE OF THE *THIRTEEN*!

THERE! IT'S READY!

ONE OF MY MORE POTENT SPELLS... STILL NOT POWERFUL ENOUGH TO DEAL WITH OUR ADVERSARY...

BUT IT WILL BE ENOUGH FOR ONE BIG SURPRISE! IT MAY NOT BE NEEDED, BUT I DO PREFER TO BE PREPARED!

LET US HOPE THAT IT WON'T BE NEEDED!

Chapter 15
MELARI'S WISH

MELARI, I NEED YOUR HELP WITH THE PACKING!

RIGHT AWAY, FELICIA!

OH, DOOFUS! WOULD YOU WATCH THE BABY FOR AWHILE?

SURE I CAN!

HI, THERE, LI'L BUD! THAT'S WHAT I CALLS YA, 'CAUSE YA AIN'T GOT NO NAME YET!

SORTA LIKE UNCLE BUSBY; HE AIN'T GOT NO NAME EITHER.

I DUNNO WHY WE CALL HIM UNCLE BUSBY...

HE AIN'T EVEN OUR UNCLE.

GLAH?

DOOFUS! WHAT DA HECK ARE YA DOIN' NOW!?

YER S'POSED TA HELP ME PACK T'INGS UP!

I'M JUS' WATCHIN' OVER LI'L BUD FOR A SPELL...

LADY RABBIT'S S'POSED T'DO DAT!

LADY RABBIT HADDA GO TA HELP LADY FOX, SO I GOTTA WATCH TH' LI'L GUY!

I NEED YA TA WATCH DA KID WHILE I ROUN' UP DA COW!

I AM WATCHIN' TH' KID!

NOT DAT KID!! DA BABY COW!!

I AIN'T CHASIN' NO COW! I'M GONNA WATCH LIL BUD, AN' I AIN'T DOIN' NOTHIN' ELSE 'TIL I'M DONE!

LISSEN, YOU HELP ME LOAD DIS STUFF, OR DERE'S GONNA BE TROUBLE! I'LL... I'LL...

WAH!

UH-OH!

THIS WHOLE EXPEDITION HAS BEEN A DISASTER! SIDETRACKED BY A GHOST... ROSE'S DEATH...

CARING FOR HER BABY... BEING STALKED BY ONE OF THE THIRTEEN...

IT'S FORTUNATE THAT JAKAL IS HERE TO ASSIST IN TRAINING FAREL!

NOW WE JUST MIGHT HAVE A CHANCE OF SURVIVAL... ALTHOUGH THE ODDS ARE STILL GREATLY AGAINST US.. IF WE HAD THE RING...

GUR! IF WE HAD THE RING! I HAVEN'T FELT A TRACE OF IT SINCE WE FOUND ROSE! I DON'T UNDERSTAND IT!

NO! NO! ROCK 'IM GENTLY! DON'T SPIN 'IM AROUND!

...AND YOU STILL HAVEN'T TOLD ME WHY YOU WANT THIS RING SO BADLY!

...I FEEL SO FRUSTRATED... WHY CAN'T I PUT THESE PIECES TOGETHER?

HUSH, LIL BABY, DON'T YA CRY... PAPA'S GONNA SWIPE YA A BUTTERFLY...

HEY! DAT WUZ POP'S SONG!

ARTH

BY GUR! I SHOULD BE ABLE TO MAKE A SIMPLE DEDUCTION FROM JUST A FEW CLUES!

WHAT USE IS THE RING TO YOU? *ONE WISH*, YOU SAID; WHAT WISH? WHAT COULD BE SO IMPORTANT TO YOU THAT YOU WOULD WANT TO...

...TO...

YOU... WANTED A BABY!

NO!
YOU COULDN'T POSSIBLY KNOW!

A YOUNG LEPKUFFT COUPLE WITH NO CHILDREN... AN EMPTY CRIB IN YOUR BEDROOM...

...YES, THAT WOULD BE THE ONE THING THAT YOU WOULD BE WILLING TO USE MAGIC FOR!

NO! NO!
YOU WEREN'T TO KNOW!
NO ONE
WAS TO KNOW!

MELARI...

WHEYAH HAVE YEW BIN, MAH BLUE-EYED SON? WHEYAH HAVE YEW BIN, MAH –

SMACK!

OW!

Y'WANNA SCARE DA KID?!?

MELARI...?

WHY WOULD YOU NEED MAGIC?

...BECAUSE I CAN'T HAVE ANY BABIES!

...I DIDN'T KNOW...

IT'S BEEN TEN YEARS SINCE WE WERE MARRIED! WE'D TRIED EVERYTHING - TO NO AVAIL! OUR LEP FRIENDS ARE TOO KIND TO SPEAK OF IT...

...BUT THE DOGONIANS CAN'T WAIT TO TALK ABOUT THE "RABBITS WITH NO KIDS"!

OOO-WOO-WOO, DO-DO-DO-DO! OOO-WOO-WOO, DO-DO-DO-DO!

PERANT TOLD ME OF HOW HIS ANCESTOR ONCE OWNED A MAGIC RING...

ITTY-BITTY PRETTY ONE, I'M A-DOWN ON-A MY KNEES... ITTY-BITTY PRETTY ONE, I'M A BEGGIN' YOU PLEASE!

THE LEP'ALN FORBIDS US LEP'KUFFT TO USE MAGIC... IT'S TOTALLY AGAINST OUR RELIGION... AND YET...

OOO-WOO-WOO, DO-DO-DO-DO! OOO-WOO-WOO, DO-DO-DO-DO!

I'M THIRTY ALREADY, FELICIA! SOON I WON'T BE ABLE TO HAVE BABIES ANYWAY - EVER!

I JUST WANT ONE OF MY OWN!

SHUSH! DON'T SAY ANY MORE; IT'S ALL RIGHT!

WE'LL KEEP THIS OUR SECRET - THE OTHERS DON'T NEED TO KNOW.

WHOA-HO-HO, WO-HO-HO-HO! WHOA-HO-HO, WO-HO-HO-HO!

...I THINK HE'S ASLEEP NOW...

GOOD! I FERGOT DA REST'A DA LYRICS!

...MANY YEARS AGO, THERE WAS A GREAT WAR, DURING WHICH THE DARK LORD CREATED AND SENT MANY MONSTERS OVER THE MOUNTAINS FROM FUNGOR.

THE CHAMPION OF THAT AGE FOUGHT AND DEFEATED EACH AND EVERY ONE OF THEM. ALL, EXCEPT FOR THE THIRTEEN.

Chapter 16
SCALE RAGE

THEY WERE THE MOST POWERFUL OF THE MONSTERS, BEINGS OF PUREST MALICE.

THEY ELUDED THE CHAMPION AND HID THEMSELVES IN THE FREE LANDS. IT'S ONE OF THEM THAT STALKS US NOW!

CAN'T YOU STOP HIM WITH YOUR MAGIC?

MY DEAR... THERE ISN'T THE MAGE ALIVE WHO CAN DEFEAT ONE OF THE THIRTEEN.

THESE MONSTERS HAVE THE BLESSINGS OF THE MURK HIMSELF.

(GASP)

JAKAL! SHE'S TALKIN' ABOUT A --

AYE.

WE'RE GOING TO BE IN FOR THE FIGHT OF OUR LIVES, SO LESS CHATTER AND KEEP ALERT!

BUT.. WE CAN'T POSSIBLY KILL IT -

WE'RE NOT EXPECTED TO. WE'RE JUST TO SLOW IT DOWN WHILE THE OTHERS ESCAPE.

OH.

THIRTEEN FLEW ACROSS THE MOUNTAINS. FIVE WERE FOUND AND SLAIN BY THE CHAMPION, WHO WAS THE ONLY MORTAL CAPABLE OF DOING SO.

THREE WERE DRIVEN BY HIM BACK TO FUNGOR, WHERE THEY STILL SERVE THEIR MASTER.
THREE WENT INTO HIDING, AND LIVE STILL IN THE KATARAN COUNTRYSIDE... SOMEWHERE...

TH... THAT'S ONLY... UM... ELEVEN...

THE MAGI HUNTED AND CONFRONTED THE TWELFTH IN A TERRIBLE BATTLE OF FLAME AND MAGIC.

THEY SLEW HIM, BUT IT TOOK ALL OF THE COMBINED MAGI TO DO IT; AND FIVE OF THEM WERE SLAIN DURING THE BATTLE.

AND THE THIRTEENTH?

NO ONE KNOWS. HE JUST VANISHED, AND WAS NEVER SEEN AGAIN.

IS DIS HIM? TH' T'IRTEENTH GUY?

NO. NOT THIS ONE. THIS IS ONE OF THE HIDDEN. I KNOW THIS PARTICULAR FIEND.

I SHOULD THINK SO.

GOOD EVENING, SORCERESS... TAKING A STROLL THIS LOVELY NIGHT?

YAH!

OH, YES, MY DARLINGS... THE SORCERESS AND I ARE OLD, DEAR COMPANIONS! WE'VE SEALED MANY A BARGAIN TOGETHER, HAVEN'T WE, MY SWEET?

EVERYONE STAND BACK! DON'T MOVE!

HOW LOVELY TO SEE YOU ALL TOGETHER. OH... IS THIS ONE OF YOUR HORSES? I FOUND IT RUNNING IN THE OPPOSITE DIRECTION...

...ALMOST AS THOUGH SOMEONE WERE TRYING TO DISTRACT MY ATTENTION. WHO WOULD DO SUCH A FOOLISH THING, I'M WONDERING...

AND JUST HOW DID BARON SWIFTY MANAGE TO TAME YOU FOR HIS WATCHDOG?

BY PUREST CHANCE. HE'D MADE A WISH – A WHIM – FOR A BETTER MEANS OF GUARDING HIS SECRETS...

AND AS WE BOTH KNOW, NO ONE GUARDS HIS SECRETS BETTER THAN A DRAGON!

IT TOOK ME QUITE A WHILE TO BREAK DOWN THE SPELLS HE PLACED ON ME, BUT AFTERWARDS I HAD SOME... CHOICE WORDS WITH HIM REGARDING THE MATTER.

I NOTICE THAT YOU'RE KEEPING SOME UNUSUAL COMPANY THESE DAYS...

THESE TRAVELERS ARE UNDER MY PROTECTION! I WILL NOT ALLOW THEM TO COME TO ANY HARM!

WHY ARE YOU HERE? WE HAVE NO BUSINESS BETWEEN US TO DISCUSS NOW!

DO WE NOT? I THINK MY MASTER SHOULD LIKE TO SEE THIS RING.

UNDER YOUR PROTECTION? HEH! HEH! DOES THE YOUNG SWORDSMAIDEN THERE KNOW WHY YOU REALLY BROUGHT HER ALONG?

WHAT...?

DON'T LISTEN TO HIM!

SECRETS, SECRETS, SECRETS... YOUR ENTIRE EXISTENCE IS FOUNDED UPON SECRETS!

SUCH IS THE LIFE OF A SORCERESS, AFTER ALL... ARE THESE VASSALS OF YOURS AWARE OF YOUR AMBITIONS AND TRUE GOALS? OR ALL THEY ALL PAWNS, LIKE THE GIRL?

DOES ONE SO POWERFUL TRULY NEED TO HIRE HERSELF OUT TO FIND LOST ARTICLES FOR THE COMMON FOLK? WOULD SHE WILLINGLY GIVE AWAY TO THE MAGI COUNCILS SUCH A POWERFUL TOKEN, OR WOULD SHE NOT FIND SOME OTHER USE FOR IT?

PAY HIM NO ATTENTION!

WHAT DOES HE MEAN -?

PAY HIM NO ATTENTION!

THE SORCERESS IS RIGHT! DON'T LISTEN! THE DRAGON'S GREATEST MALICE LIES IN HIS SPEECH!

BUT...

HE MIXES LIES WITH HALF-TRUTHS TO TWIST OUR HEARTS FROM THE TRUTH! YOU CAN'T TRUST HIS WORDS!

BUT...

NOW! WE MUST ATTACK! COME, FAREL!

BUT... Y... YES! I AM WITH YOU!

YES, COME! COME, LITTLE PEOPLE! WE CAN PLAY TOGETHER FOR AWHILE! BUT I FEAR THAT ONE HORSE WAS TOO SMALL FOR MY APPETITES... SO PLAY WHILE YOU MAY!

QUICKLY! GATHER AROUND WHILE JAKAL AND FAREL DISTRACT HIM!

WE STILL HAVE ONE CHANCE LEFT!

NOW! FAREL! JAKAL! TO ME!

EH? A FEINT?

YES, MARAMANOS... LIKE ALL GOOD MAGICIANS, I KNOW THE VALUE OF SLEIGHT-OF-HAND!

AND I ALWAYS KEEP ONE GOOD TRICK IN RESERVE!

POOF

ROOOAR!

Chapter 17
DRAGON plight

WH... WHERE ARE WE?!

EVERYONE STAY CLOSE! WE'RE NOT OUT OF DANGER YET!

FELICIA! WHERE ARE WE? WHAT IS THIS PLACE?

THE LAND OF THE DEAD!

THIS IS AS SAFE A HAVEN AS WE WILL FIND FROM THE DRAGON!

I'D HOPED NOT TO COME HERE, BUT THERE ARE FEW WAYS TO ESCAPE A DRAGON!

BUT... HOW WILL WE GET BACK TO AR WIRLD?

WHEN IT'S TIME, WE'LL BE ABLE TO RETURN. RIGHT NOW, WE HAVE MORE PRESSING MATTERS!

EVERYBODY TAKE ONE OF THESE CANDLES!

CANDLES!?

THESE WON'T DISPEL THIS DAMNABLE GLOOM...

THEY'RE NOT INTENDED TO; THEY'RE MEANT FOR PROTECTION!

PROTECTION?

YOU ARE IN THE ABODE OF THE RECENT DEAD. YOUR LIFE BLAZES LIKE A BEACON TO THEM, AND THEY ARE HUNGRY FOR IT... HUNGRY TO LIVE AGAIN, BY TAKING YOUR BODIES AND LIVES FROM YOU!

THESE CANDLES ARE BLESSED, AND WILL KEEP THE SPIRITS AWAY FROM US.

DOOFUS! DOOLEY! I WANT YOU TO STAY ESPECIALLY CLOSE TO MELARI, TO GUARD HER AND THE BABY!

THE STRONG GLOW OF A NEWBORN BABY IS PARTICULARLY ATTRACTIVE TO THEM!

WE ARE FLEEING, KNI JAKAL! OUR DISAPPEARANCE WON'T FOOL MARAMANOS FOR VERY LONG, AND HE'LL BE ON OUR TRAIL ONCE HE RECOVERS FROM HIS SURPRISE.

WHERE ARE WE GOING?

WE NEED TO TRAVEL AROUND' HIM, BEFORE WE CAN RETURN HOME... AND BEFORE HE CAN FIND US!

YOU'VE NO OTHER MAGIC TO STOP HIM?

THIS WAS MY ONLY TRICK, A LAST RESORT.

IT OCCURS TO ME, SORCERESS, THAT YOUR 'BUSINESS DEALINGS' CARRY AN EXTREMELY HEAVY PENALTY!

YOU'RE ENTITLED TO YOUR OPINIONS.

YOUR AMBITIONS ARE LIKELY TO BE THE DEATH OF EVERYONE HERE, INCLUDING THE INNOCENT BABY... THIS IS NOT OPINION, MILADY!

THANK YOU, kni JAKAL!

WISOR! THE SPIRITS ARE GATHERING TIGHTIR AROUND US!

EVERYONE! FOLLOW ME!

OCH! THEY'RE EVRYWHIR! GAT AWAY FROM US, YOU DEMONS!

DON'T WURRY, MELORI... THEY WON'T GAT TO WEE BUD PAST ME!

TH... THANK YOU, FAREL!

D... D... DOOLEY... I'M G... G... GETTIN' SCARED!

WE'RE G... GONNA GET LOST IN THIS GHOST PLACE...

...OR TH' D... DRAGON'S GONNA FIND US AN'... AN' EAT US...!

NO HE AIN'T! QUIT SAYIN' DAT!

LISSEN! AIN'T I ALWAYS TOOK CARE A'YA? QUIT WHININ' AN' RUN! YER GONNA GIT AWAY, YA UNNERSTAN'?

DAT DRAGON AIN'T NEVER GONNA FIND YA!

WRONG!

ALMIGHTY ALN! HE'S FOUND US ALREADY!

RUN!

JAKAL! FAREL! WE'LL HAVE TO GIVE THE OTHERS A CHANCE TO FLEE TO SAFETY!

SAFETY? AMONG THE DEAD?

AND WITH YOU GONE, SORCERESS, HOW SHALL THEY RETURN TO THE LAND OF THE LIVING?

DRAGON, I'M TIRED OF HEARING YOUR VOICE!

AND I'VE OTHER AFFAIRS TO BE ATTENDING TO!

ROOOAR!

SO DIE!

OH, NOT SO EASILY, I'M AFRAID... NOT EVEN HERE!

QUICKLY, DOOLEY! UP THIS WAY! PERHAPS WE CAN HIDE ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THIS RISE!

YES'M!

DOOFUS! C'MON!

DOOFUS?!

C'MON! RUN! WE GOTTA GIT LADY RABBIT AN' BUD TA SAFETY!

HE'S GONNA GIT US, AIN'T HE, DOOLEY? GONNA GIT US AN' COOK US AN' EAT US LIKE CHICKENS!

QUIT SAYIN' DAT!

JUS' SHUT UP AN' RUN!

NO! I'M S... SCARED! I DON'T WANNA BE HERE! I WANT FOR SOMEONE T'KILL THAT DRAGON! I... I...

...I WISH SOMEONE WOULD HELP US!!

THIS IS THE END OF ALL, SORCERESS... OF YOUR AMBITIONS, YOUR DESIRES, YOUR PACTS... YOUR GREATEST POWERS ARE INEFFECTIVE AGAINST ME...

YOU ARE LOST HERE FOREVER, AMONG THE LOST SPIRITS OF THE DEAD... YOU NO LONGER HAVE EVEN THE DIMMEST OF HOPES REMAINING TO YOU.

FAREL!

NO.

YOU ARE WRONG, MARAMANOS.

EVEN AMONG THE DEAD...
...THERE IS STILL ROOM FOR WISHES TO BE ANSWERED!

Chapter 18
SPIRIT OF HOPE

THESE MORTALS ARE NOT FOR YOU, MARAMANOS! GO, AND LEAVE THEM IN PEACE!

HA! HA! HA! I HAVE MORE CLAIM TO THEM THAN YOU MIGHT THINK! TAKE THEM, IF YOU DARE!

SOON, WARRIOR... BE PATIENT!

DOOFUS! IS THAT YOUR "MAGIC" PONY?!

UM... UH... YEP!

COME TO ME, THEN, O PRETTY ONE, AND I'LL SET YOU FREE FROM YOUR SMOLDERING CORPSE, TO JOIN THE OTHER WANDERING SOULS!

AS YOU WISH, O FOOL OF THE DARK!

A... A SACRED UNICORN! HAS IT COME TO HELP US?

...AND... DO I DERE TRUST THE SARCIRESS STILL? THE DRAGON SAID -- NO! JAKAL SAYS TO IGNARE THE MONSTIR'S WARDS...

...SO I'LL TRY!

THIS WILL BE THE FINISH OF OUR RIVALRY, ARELL!

BUT ONLY BECAUSE YOU WISH IT!

A UNICORN!? PRAISE ALN! WE MIGHT STILL HAVE A CHANCE OF GETTING OUT OF THIS ALIVE! IF WE FLANK THE DRAGON, WE...

...THERE'S TOO MUCH INTERFERENCE... AND IT'S OWN MAGIC PROTECTS IT FROM DISCOVERY!

WHAT IS IT, WISOR?

...I THOUGHT I FELT... *BY GUR!* THE RING IS HERE!

WHERE?

I CAN'T TELL...

NEVER MIND NOW! WE MUST CONTINUE TO DISTRACT THE DRAGON SO THE OTHERS CAN GET TO SAFETY!

TOO MANY GHOSTS! THERE'S NO PLACE TO RUN!

DOOFUS! C'MON! DON'T STOP NOW!

NO! NO! THEY'S TOO MANY! MAKE 'EM GO AWAY, DOOLEY!

C'MON! WE GOTTA GIT LADY RABBIT AN' DA BABY OUTTA HERE!

I JUST GONNA HIDE 'TIL THEY GO AWAY!

DON'T DO DIS, DOOFUS! I ALLUS TOOK CARE A' YOUSE... BUT... WE PROMISED TA HELP LADY RABBIT!

YA GOTTA GIT UP AN' RUN!

NONONONO LEMME 'LONE!

DOOFUS? DOOLEY? WHAT'S WRONG – ?

OH!

NO!

THE BABY!
I LOST THE BABY!

DOOFUS! DOOLEY!
HELP ME!

I HAVE TO FIND HIM BEFORE THE SPIRITS DO!

THEY'LL KILL HIM TO TAKE HIS LIFE FOR THEIR OWN!

I CAN'T FIND HIM!

BUD?

I'M COMIN' LIL BUD!

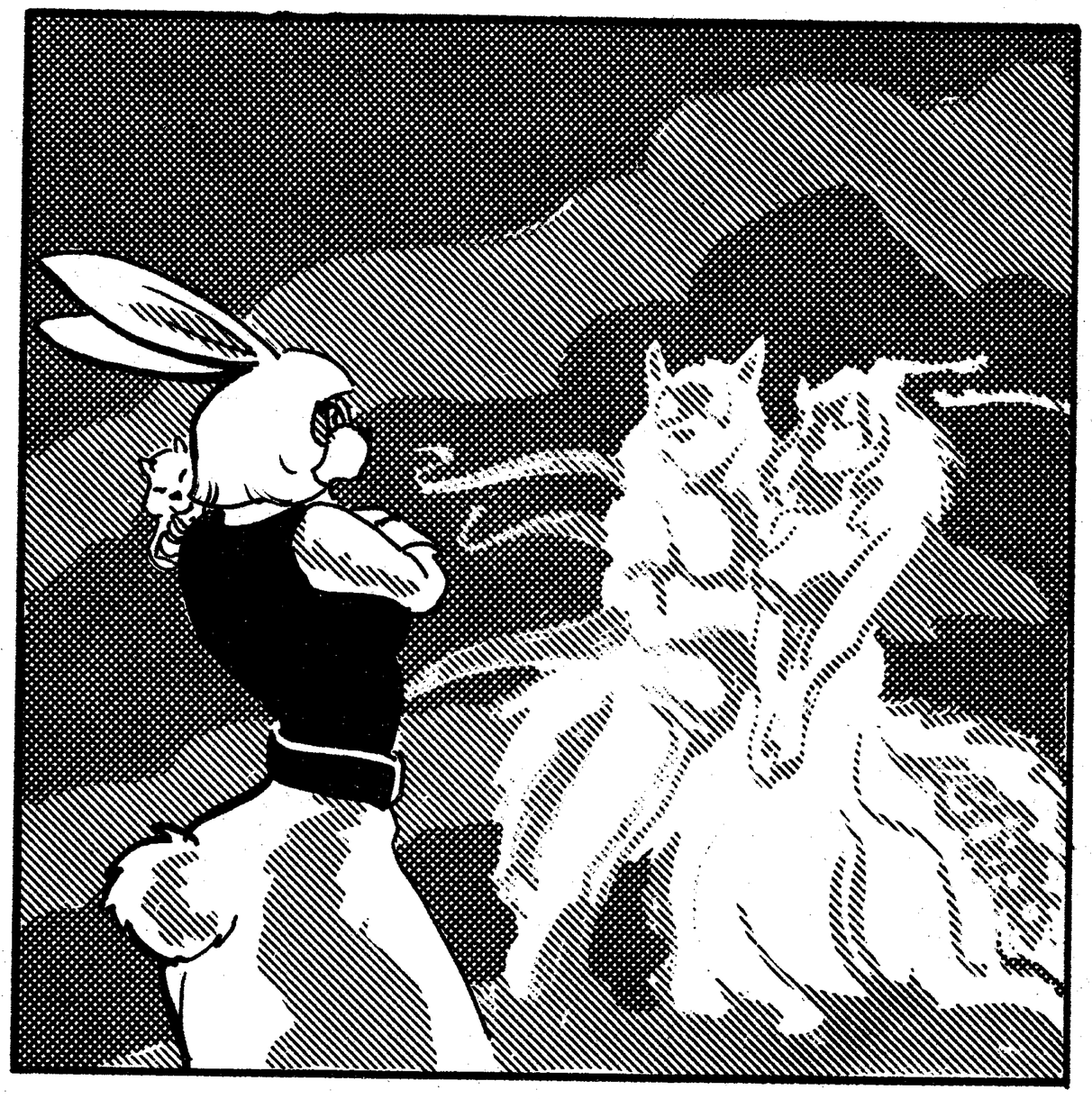
LOOK! THERE! THAT COMMOTION! ONE OF THE SPIRITS IS FIGHTING WITH THE OTHERS!

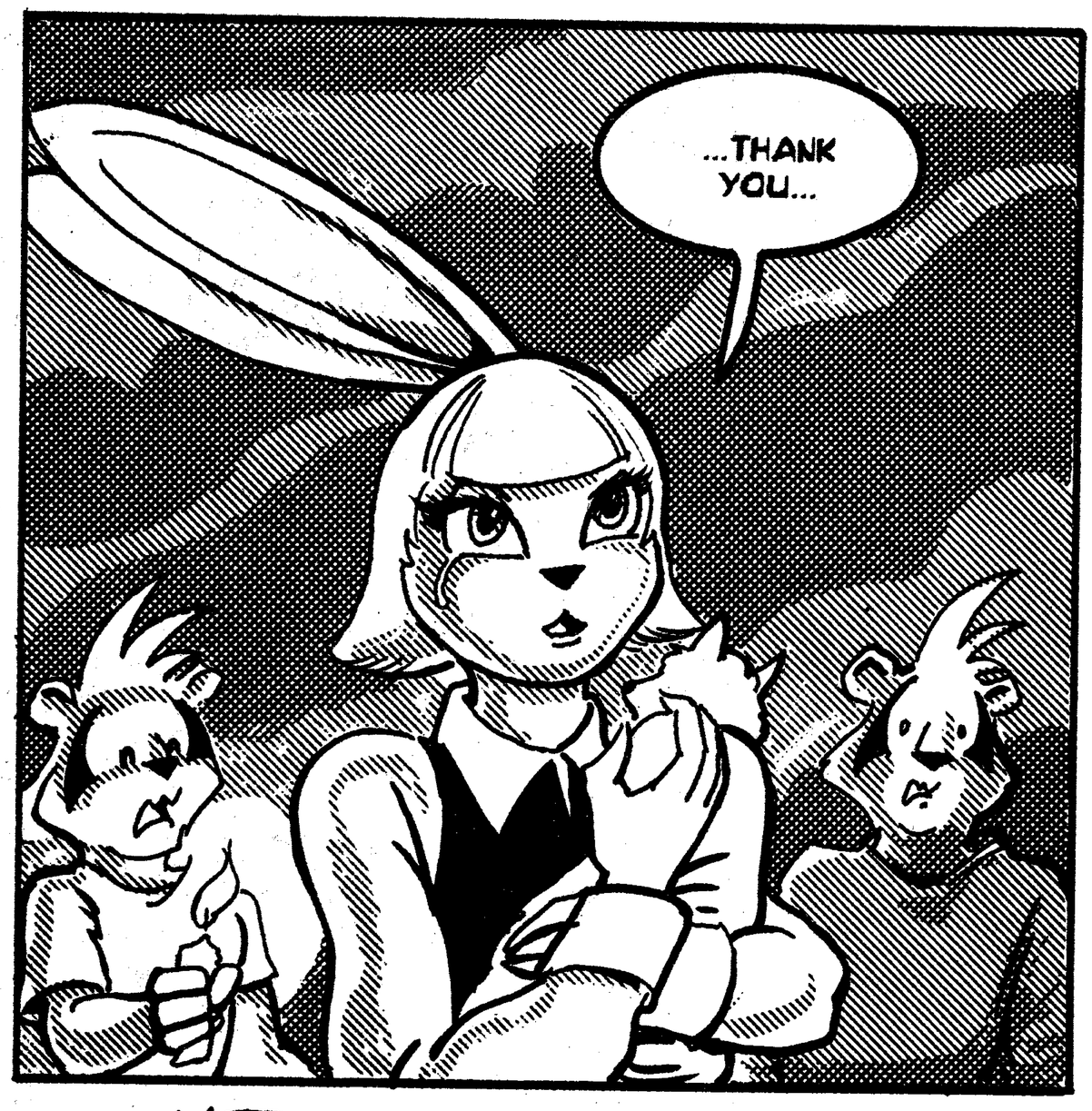
ROSE!

(GASP)

NO!

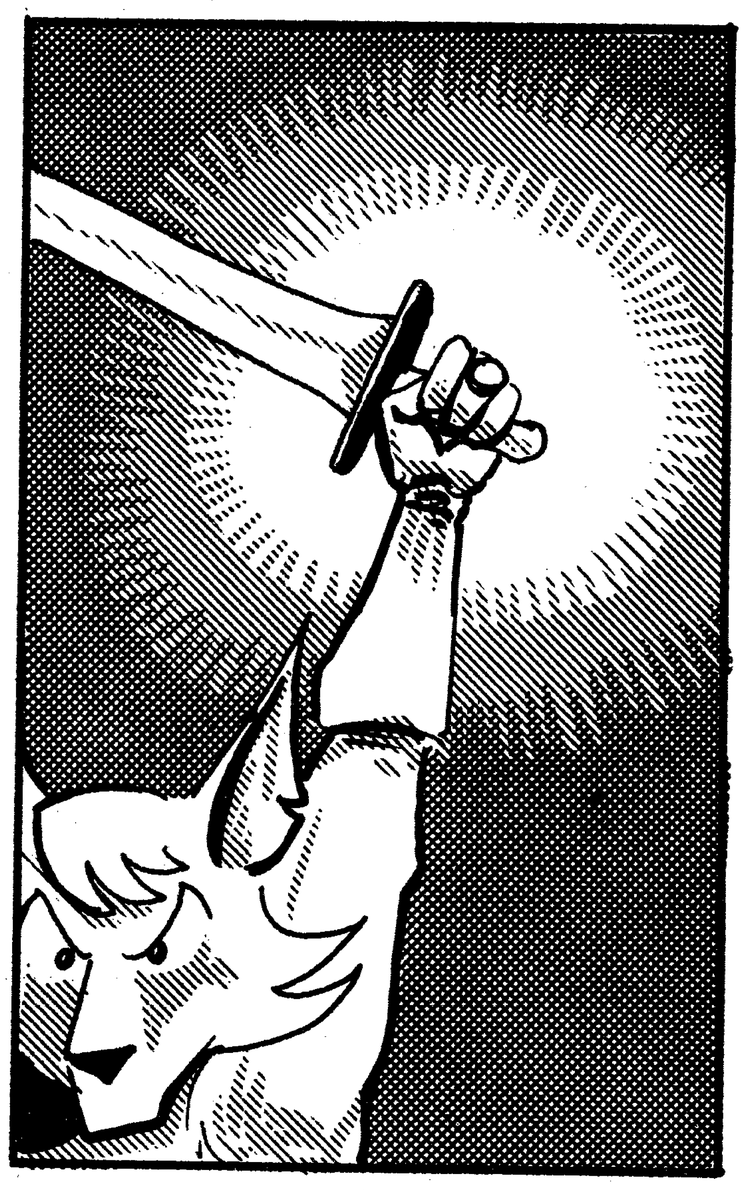
IT'S THE BABY! SAVE HIM BEFORE -



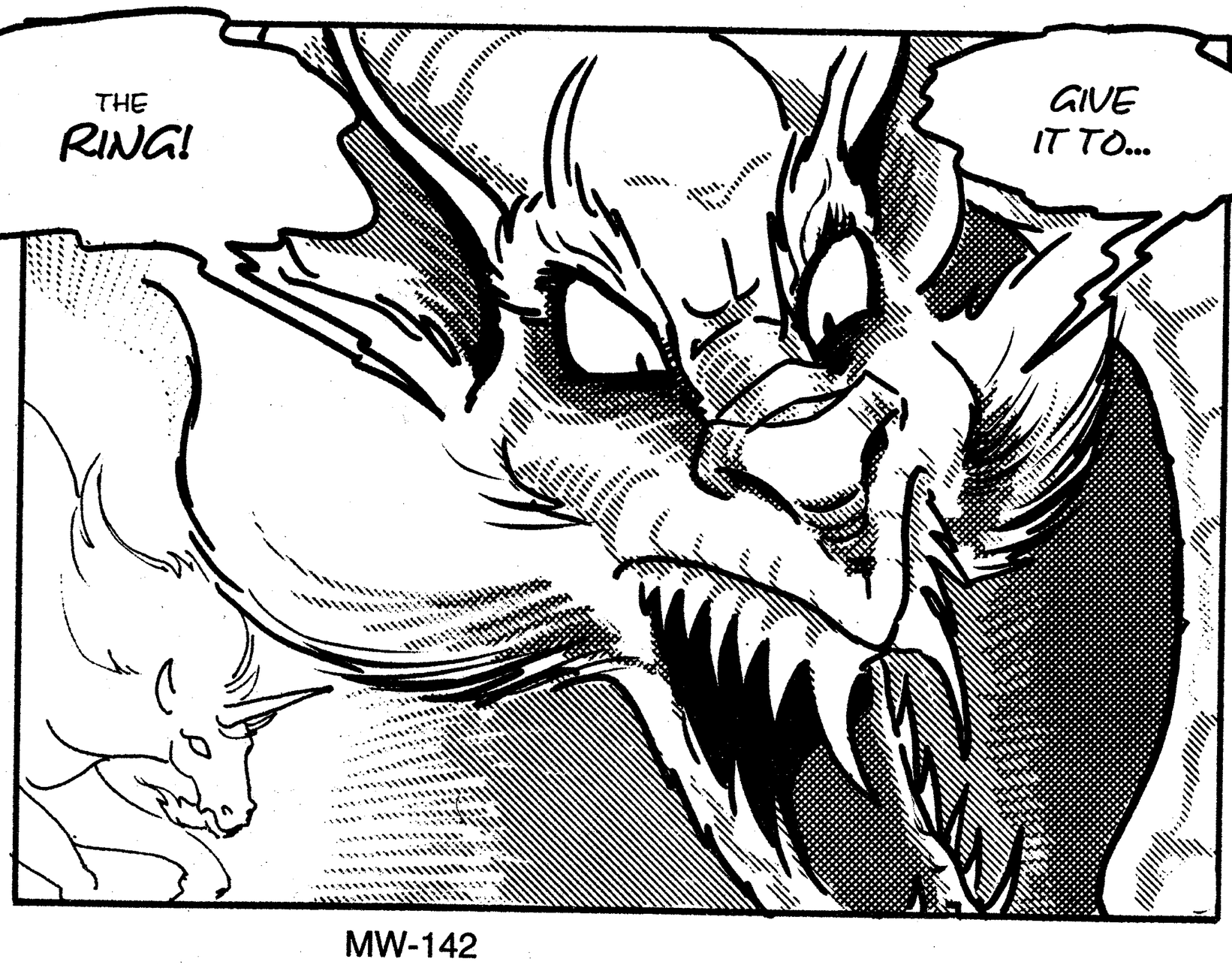

...THANK YOU...

...WHY DOESN'T HE ATTACK?

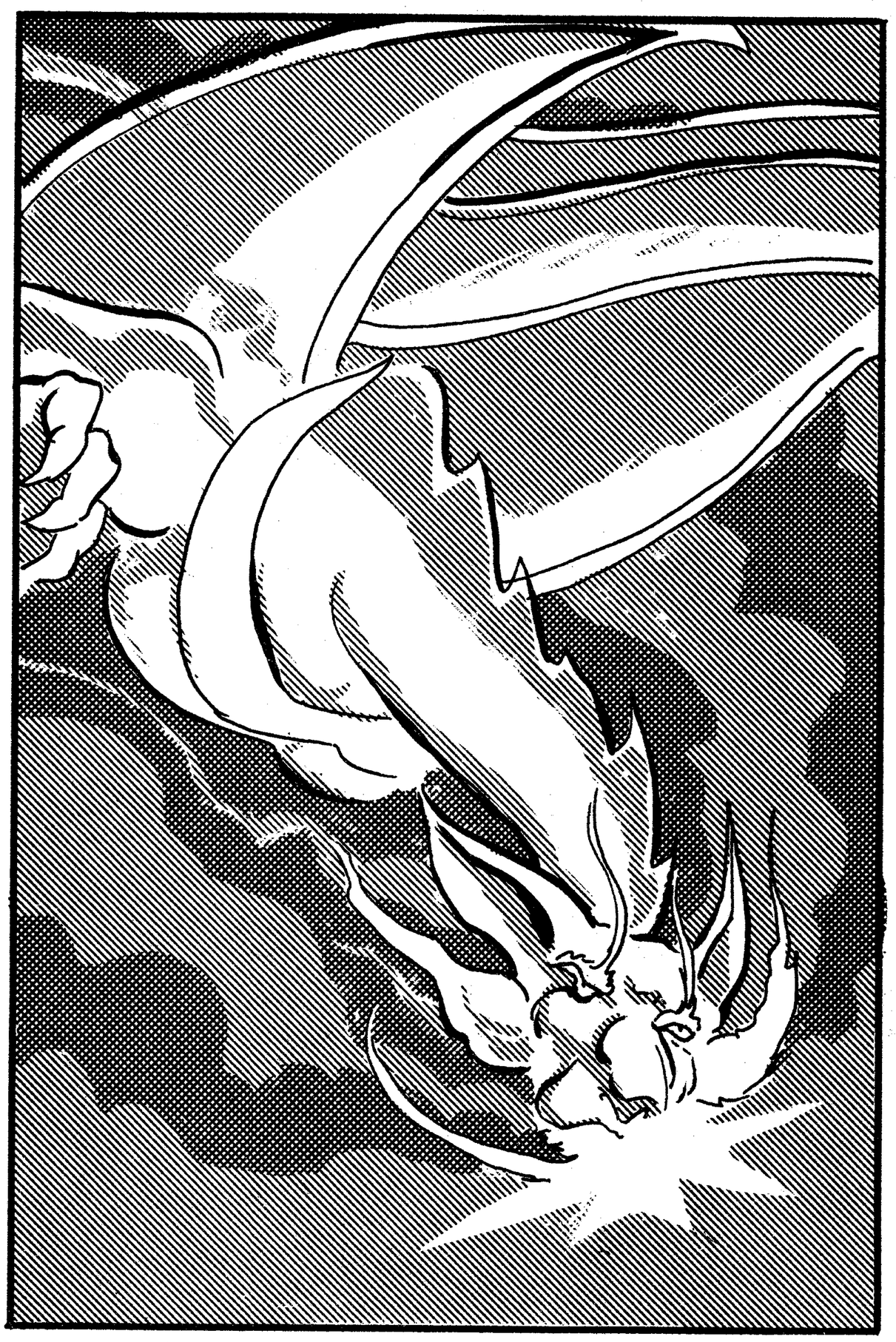
I DON'T KNOW... IT'S AS IF HE WERE WAITING -
NOW, WARRIOR! NOW!

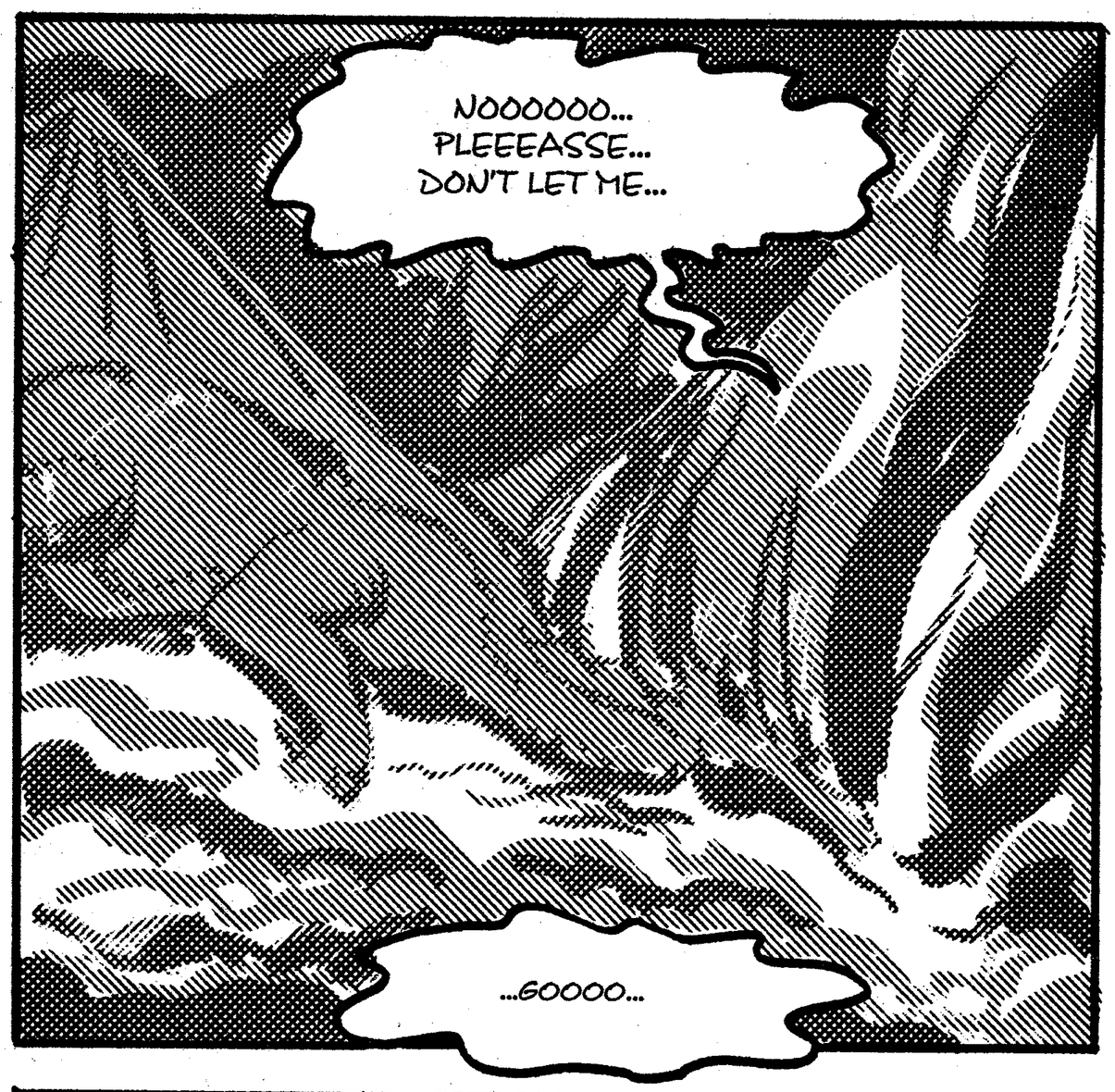


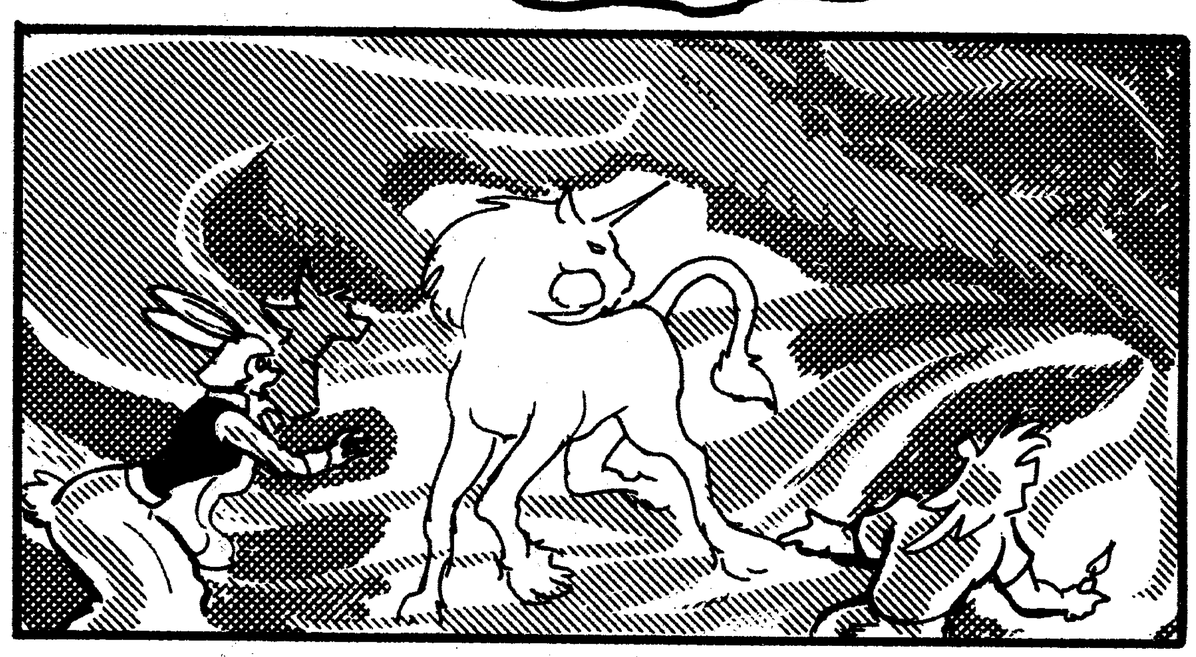
EH?


THE RING!
GIVE IT TO...

...MEEEEEE
ARGGH!




NOOOOOO...
PLEEEASSE...
DON'T LET ME...
...GOOOO...



(WHEW)!

...AND HOW DID YOU COME TO HAVE POSSESSION OF THE WISHGEM RING?

I WAS SENT TO FOLLOW YOU. I FOUND YOUR TRAIL NOT FAR FROM WHERE YOU FOUND THE BOY'S BODY.

I WAITED UNTIL YOU HAD MOVED ON...

...THEN I CAME DOWN TO EXAMINE YOUR CAMPGROUND.

Chapter 19
FORGIVENESS

NOT FAR FROM WHERE THE BOY, TOBY, WAS SLAIN, I FOUND THE RING. I HAD THOUGHT IT TO BE A STOLEN HEIRLOOM, BUT MY GRACIOUS STEED SHOWED ME THAT IT WAS MORE VALUABLE THAN I HAD FIRST IMAGINED!

SWIFTY COULDN'T FIND THE RING IN TIME TO SAVE HIS LIFE! BUT WHY DID YOU WAIT SO LONG TO USE IT AGAINST THE DRAGON?

I ADVISED HIM TO HOLD IT IN HIDING, UNTIL IT WAS NEEDED.

YES. I'M SURE YOU DID!

OF COURSE! OF COURSE! TOBY STOLE THE RING FROM SWIFTY! THAT'S WHY HE WAS PURSUED AND KILLED! AND THAT'S HOW THE DRAGON WAS ABLE TO BREAK FREE FROM HIS CAPTIVITY!

THE RING WOULD BE FAR MORE POTENT IN A REGION WHERE LIGHT AND DARK WOULD BE IN BALANCE!

THE LAND OF THE DEAD! WHERE YOU KNEW I WOULD SEND US!

...I KNOW OF YOU, DO I NOT?

YES.

MANY YEARS AGO I COMMITTED AN OFFENSE.

FOR THAT SIN, I WAS EXILED AND DOOMED TO A PENANCE. I TOOK ON THE FORM OF A STATUETTE, AND WAS PLACED AMONG AN ARTIST'S WORKS.

"FOR CENTURIES I WAS PASSED FROM OWNER TO OWNER. THOSE LUCKY ENOUGH TO DISCOVER MY SECRET WERE ABLE TO FREE ME TEMPORARILY AND BE GRANTED THREE WISHES. THUS I SPENT THE YEARS OF MY PENANCE. I WAS EVENTUALLY BROUGHT TO THE ESTATE OF THE DUKE cla di BURROWS AND LEFT TO GATHER DUST."

YESSS.... THE STATUETTE! I REMEMBER! TO THINK THAT WE NEVER EVEN KNEW!

NOR COULD I TELL YOU, FOR I COULD AWAKEN ONLY IF PROPERLY SUMMONED. AFTER THE FALL OF THE BURROWS CLAN, I WAS CLAIMED BY THE DUKE cla di HOWLER, AND PASSED FROM HEIR TO HEIR UNTIL MY POWER WAS DISCOVERED, AND I WAS CALLED FORTH ONCE MORE TO SERVE.

AN'... AN' YOU WUR FARCED TO DO THIS...?

...AS A PUNISHMENT?

NO. I WAS NOT FORCED. I ACCEPTED THIS DOOM WILLINGLY.

"THE PRESENT DUKE DISCOVERED ME WHILE HE WAS YOUNG, AND I SAVED HIM FROM AN ASSASSIN."

"HE NEXT CALLED UPON ME YEARS LATER TO CARRY HIS LOVE AND CHILD TO SAFE HAVEN..."

"...HIDDEN AWAY FROM A VENGEFUL ENEMY."

AND NOW HE HAS CALLED UPON YOU FOR THE THIRD TIME?

YES.
I WAS SENT TO PROTECT THE MOST VALUABLE OF HIS TREASURES. IT WAS WHEN WE ARRIVED THAT I BECAME AWARE OF A GREATER THREAT TO THEM FROM THE DRAGON, AND SWIFTLY TOOK MEASURES TO GUARD AGAINST BOTH DANGERS.

...EVEN AS I CONTINUE TO WATCH OVER MY CHARGE THIS VERY MINUTE!

HMP!

"PLACING THE RING IN JAKAL'S SAFEKEEPING, I REVERTED TO MY INERT FORM, AFTER FIRST INSTRUCTING THE KNIGHT TO PLACE ME WHERE THE THIEF WOULD DISCOVER ME LATER."

"SO LONG AS HE DID NOT DIRECTLY ORDER ME OTHERWISE, I COULD EASILY GRANT HIS WISHES AS WELL AS CONTINUE TO GUARD MY FIRST CHARGE... AND I WOULD BE ABLE TO WATCH YOU ALL FROM WITHIN."

"THE FIRST WISH WAS FOOLISH AND WASTED; THE LAST, DESPERATE AND GLADLY GRANTED."

...OKAY, YA BLEW TH' FIRST WISH, WANTIN' TA KNOW WHAT TA DO...

...AN' YA WISHED FER SOMEONE TA KILL TH' DRAGON...

...SO WHAT WAS TH' THIRD WISH FER?

(MOOMPHIES)

WHAT?

YOU WASTED A WISH ON COOKIES!?

COOKIES! A WHOLE BAG OF BRAZZLEBERRY COOKIES!

YOU BONEHEAD!

SO, NOW YOUR WORK IS DONE, YOUR DUTY IS DISCHARGED, AND THE WISHES ARE GRANTED!

YES. FOR NOW.

AND BECAUSE I HAVE SERVED FAITHFULLY AND HAVE DONE ALL THAT WAS ASKED OF ME...

...I AM NOW PERMITTED TO ASK A BOON OF YOU. LITTLE THIEF...

HEY!

...WILL YOU FORGIVE ME?

HUH? WHAT FOR? YOU DIN'T DO NOTHIN'!

...DID'JA?

JAKAL kni di HOWLER... WILL YOU FORGIVE ME?

I?

I'M AFRAID I DON'T UNDERSTAND...

I HEARD YOU ASK THIS OF THE DUKE, BUT, LIKE HIM, I AM ALSO AT A LOSS!

TO FORGIVE YOU, I WOULD HAVE HAD TO HAVE FIRST CONDEMNED YOU...

...AND I DO NOT KNOW WHAT YOU MAY HAVE DONE!

I AM SORRY... I'M UNABLE TO HELP YOU!

MISTRESS SORCERESS...

...WILL YOU FORGIVE ME?

NO.

NO, I DO KNOW OF YOUR PAST, ARELL, AND OF YOUR CRIME... AND I CANNOT BE THE ONE TO GRANT YOUR BOON.

YOU MUST ASK OF THE OTHERS!

MASTER DOOFUS... WILL YOU FORGIVE ME?

UM... UM... UM... UM... UH...

kni FAREL... WILL YOU FORGIVE ME?

WHY? WHAT WILL HAPPEN IF I DO? WHAT WOULD HAPPEN TO ME IF I DON'T?

YOU CAN'T EXPECT US TO FORGIVE YOU FAR SOMETHIN' WE KNOW NOTHIN' ABOUT... AR WHAT SARTA REPERCUSSIONS WE MIGHT FACE..

NO! WAIT!

I UNDERSTAND NOW! DON'T YOU SEE? IT ISN'T IMPORTANT WHAT HE DID... IT DOESN'T REALLY MATTER!

WHATEVER IT WAS, IT WAS BETWEEN HIM AND THE ONE HE OFFENDED!

TO MAKE AMENDS, YOU UNDERTOOK A PENANCE OF YOUR OWN FREE WILL, YOU SAID... NO ONE CONDEMNED YOU TO THIS BUT YOURSELF... RIGHT?

WHAT MATTERS IS THAT YOU WERE TRULY SINCERE AND REPENTANT!

I FORGIVE YOU.

I'M... FORGIVEN? AT LAST?!

THEN... I AM FREE!

AND... I CAN GO...

...HOME.

THANK YOU, GOOD LADY!

"THANK YOU!"

Chapter 20
UNKEPT BARGAINS

FAREL?

WHAT'S WRONG? YOU DIDN'T JOIN US FOR BREAKFAST...

SHE LIED TO ME! SHE LIED! SHE SAID SHE WOULD TEACH ME TO BE A *GREAT* FIGHTIR!

BUT ALL I EVIR WAS, WAS BAIT FIR TH' DRAGON!

FAREL, NO, LISTEN...

SHE LIED, SHE YELLED AT ME, SHE DROVE ME, SHE HUMILIATED ME... SHE... SHE *USED* ME!

BY *GUR*! THIS SARCIRESS STILL OWES ME! AN' I INTEND TO *COLLECT* FROM HIR!

FAREL! YOU CAN'T CONFRONT A MAGI IN THIS MANNER - !

YOU JUST WATCH ME, kni JAKAL!

AND HERE IS THE OBJECT OF OUR QUEST - THE WISHGEM RING!

...A PITY THAT OUR BATTLE WITH THE DRAGON LEFT ITS MAGIC SO SEVERELY DEPLETED!

DEPLETED?

YES; IT TOOK BOTH THE RING AND THE UNICORN TO KILL MARAMANOS. IT USED THE LAST REMAINING BIT OF MAGIC IN THE RING. THESE THINGS AREN'T INEXHAUSTIBLE, YOU KNOW!

...OH, I... SEE.

I'M SORRY, MELARI. THIS WHOLE QUEST HAS NOT BEEN WORTH ALL THIS TROUBLE FOR YOU.

YOU DID FIND THE RING, THOUGH, SO THE BARGAIN WAS KEPT.

FELICIA... WHERE ARE DOOFUS AND DOOLEY THIS MORNING?

GONE. THEY LEFT DURING THE NIGHT. RETURNING TO LOOT THEIR SHARE OF SWIFTY'S CASTLE, NOW THAT THE DRAGON IS DEAD.

I DO HOPE THAT THEY REMEMBER TO SET MY SHARE ASIDE...

...IT WAS IN OUR CONTRACT, AFTER ALL.

SUCH A LOVELY RING! IT'S ALMOST A SHAME I HAVE TO TURN IT OVER TO THE MAGI COUNCILS!

EVEN THOUGH IT'S POWERLESS?

(SIGH) YES, I'M AFRAID I MUST!

IT WAS ALL FAR NOTHIN', WASN'T IT? NOTHIN' FAR MELORI; NOTHIN' FAR YOU; NOTHIN' FAR ME!

SO WHAT WAS TH' POINT?!

GOOD MORNING, FAREL!

ONLY TH' RAKLINES GAT ANYTHIN' OUT OF THIS... BECAUSE THA'RE THIEVES!

WE FOUND YAR PRECIOUS RING; I SARVED AS YIR GUIDE AND PROTECTIR AS BEST I COULD...!

NOW YOU HAVE TO MAKE ME A WORRIAR!

CHILD, THERE ISN'T ENOUGH MAGIC IN ALL OF KAZ TO MAKE A SILK PURSE FROM THE SOW'S EAR THAT YOU ARE.

I DON'T BELIEVE THAT!

YOU WARN'T SITTIN' IN A TREE OUTSIDE TH' BARON cla di HOWLIR'S MANIR ON AN IDLE WHIM!

YOU WANTED ME ON THIS QUEST FAR SOME PERPOSE, DIN'T YOU?!

OH, DEAR.

DID YOU LISTEN TO THE DRAGON?

WHY BRING ME ALONG IF I WAS USELESS TO YOU? WHY BOTHIR, UNLESS YOU REALLY THOUGHT YOU COULD TRAIN ME BETTIR THAN I WAS?

WHY?

WHY NOT? YOU WERE HANDY; I NEEDED SOMEONE TO SERVE AS A DISTRACTION, IN THE EVENT OF TROUBLE - SO THAT I WOULD HAVE TIME TO PREPARE MY MAGIC.

WHAT BETTER DISTRACTION THAN A QUICK-TEMPERED GIRL WHO MAKES A LOUD SHOW OF NEEDLESSLY WAVING HER SWORD ABOUT LIKE A MANIAC?

ALL THE SAME, IF YOU RECALL, I DID GIVE YOU A RATHER EXTENSIVE TRAINING AS A WARRIOR!

YOU TRIED TO GIVE ME THREE YIRS WARTH IN TWO DAYS! HOW COULD I EVIR POSSIBLY LARN ALL THAT AT ONCE?

AND WHAT HAVE I GOT TO SHOW FAR ALL THAT?!

YOU FACED A DRAGON... AND YOU LIVED!

NOT MANY MORTALS CAN MAKE THAT CLAIM! YOU CAN NOW TRADE THAT CLAIM FOR YOUR OWN WEIGHT IN GOLD AND FAME!

I DIDN'T WANT GOLD AR FAME!

I WANTED A NAME!!

FAREL!

MADAM SORCERESS... MAY I SPEAK WITH YOU?
FAREL, PLEASE WAIT!

WHY, OF COURSE, kni JAKAL...

WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO... DISCUSS?

WHAT ARE YOUR INTENTIONS CONCERNING FAREL?

MY INTENTIONS?

OH, NONE FOR THE TIME BEING, I SUPPOSE... THERE WILL BE OTHER DAYS FOR PLAYING GAMES...

AND I'VE NO DESIRE TO LOCK HORNS WITH A UNICORN AT THIS TIME!

AND JUST WHAT ARE YOUR INTENTIONS, JAKAL kni di HOWLER?

I WOULD TRAIN HER. I BELIEVE SHE HAS THE POTENTIAL TO BE A FINE WARRIOR. I'VE ALWAYS BELIEVED THAT!

I BELIEVE THAT YOU HAD BEST WATCH YOUR HEART, JAKAL!

...YOUNG LOVE...!

Chapter 21
FELICIA'S WISH

THIS IS WHERE WE PART. PARANT, I KNOW, HAS ALREADY SHIPPED MY FEE AHEAD TO MY TOWER.

BUD SHOULD HAVE NO DIFFICULTY IN FINDING A HOME HERE; ANY OF THE DOGONIAN FAMILIES WOULD SURELY LOVE TO ADOPT HIM.

I AM SINCERELY SORRY THAT THIS TRIP HAS BEEN SUCH A WASTE OF TIME FOR YOU.

BUT WHO COULD HAVE KNOWN THAT THE RING'S MAGIC WOULD WIND UP EXHAUSTED FROM FIGHTING A DRAGON?

ALL THAT DANGER AND YOU'VE NOT A THING TO SHOW FOR IT. IT'S SUCH A TRAGEDY, REALLY.

...STILL...

...PERHAPS...

...PERHAPS WE MIGHT BE ABLE TO COAX ONE LAST, WEE BIT OF MAGIC FROM IT IF WE TRY...

I WISH -

NO.

BUT THANK YOU.

I KNOW NOW THAT MY MISGIVINGS WERE RIGHT; MAGIC DOESN'T REALLY SOLVE ANYTHING.

I SHOULD HAVE TRUSTED TO THE TEACHINGS OF THE LEP'ALN!

WHEN WE WERE IN THE LAND OF THE DEAD... WHEN ROSE HANDED ME HER BABY TO TAKE TO SAFETY... HER EYES TOLD ME SO MUCH MORE THAN WORDS.

PARAN'L AND I HAVE NO CHILDREN... BUD HAS NO PARENTS.

IT WON'T BE EASY... A LEP'KUFFT COUPLE RAISING A DOGONIAN CHILD... MANY WON'T ACCEPT IT...

LIFE IS NEVER EASY. BUT WE'LL HAVE EACH OTHER, AND WE'LL FACE OUR TROUBLES ONE DAY AT A TIME.

GOODBYE, FELICIA... AND THANK YOU FOR ALL OF YOUR GUIDANCE AND KINDNESS!

I LIED, OF COURSE.

JUST AS I HAVE ALWAYS LIED.

THE RING IS NOT DORMANT... NOT YET! ONE WISH STILL REMAINS... AND IT IS MINE TO MAKE!

FROM THE MOMENT I KNEW OF THE RING'S WHEREABOUTS, I CHOSE THE PLAYERS OF THIS GAME CAREFULLY. ONLY THE DRAGON AND UNICORN WERE OF ANY REAL SURPRISE, AND THEIR PRESENCE SO VERY NEARLY UPSET ALL OF MY PLANS... NEARLY, BUT NOT ENTIRELY!

WELL, ROSE WAS ANOTHER SURPRISE, I MUST CONFESS, BUT NOT AN INSURMOUNTABLE ONE... AND I ADMIT THAT I WAS MORE THAN PLEASED TO GIVE WHAT AID I COULD.

BUT THE GAME WAS TRULY THE THING... AND THE RING WAS THE TRUE PRIZE! THE RING, WHOSE STONE IS A FRAGMENT OF A MUCH MORE POWERFUL TALISMAN!

THE MAGI HAVE BEEN CHARGED TO TURN THESE FRAGMENTS TO THE MAGI COUNCILS FOR SAFEKEEPING.

BUT WHY SHOULD I?

WHAT DID THE COUNCILS EVER DO FOR ME, BUT SCORN MY PRACTICE AND RIDICULE ME THROUGHOUT MY CAREER? ME! THE MOST POWERFUL SORCERESS IN ALL THE FREE LANDS!

NO. THE RING IS MINE, EARNED FAIRLY BY THE TERMS AGREED UPON... AND I WILL USE IT AS I SEE FIT!

POOR FAREL!
...AN UNWITTING PAWN,
PRODDED AND MANEUVERED
ABOUT IN
A GAME SHE HAS NO KNOWLEDGE
OF!

(SIGH)
SUCH A TWISTED PATH
I'VE TREAD SINCE MY YOUTH.

...ORPHANED AS A CHILD,
WHEN THE HOWLERS STOLE
MY FAMILY'S LANDS
AND TITLES...

FAREL WHINES OF HOW
SHE HAS NEITHER NAME
NOR TITLE...
BAH!

HERS IS MERELY HIDDEN...
BUT MINE WAS STOLEN!

POLITICS AND RELIGION:
MY FAMILY STOOD AT THE
WRONG END OF BOTH,
AND WE WERE DESTROYED
FOR OUR BELIEFS.

ALONE,
A CHILD WITH NO AFFILIATION,
THERE WAS NEVER EVEN A
DREAM OF RECOVERING ALL
THAT I HAD LOST...

WHEN A BODY IS DEPRIVED
OF LOVE, ONLY REVENGE IS LEFT
TO SUSTAIN AND DRIVE THE
SPIRIT!
PURE AND UNREQUITED
VENGEANCE!

THAT'S
WHY I BECAME
A SORCERESS!

FOR ALL OF MY LIFE, I HAVE LIVED IN THE SHADOW OF THE EVIL DONE TO ME AND MY FAMILY!

BUT NOW I HAVE THE MAGIC I NEED TO COMPLETE MY VENGEANCE!

I CAN WISH FOR THEM ALL TO DIE, AND THEY WOULD!

ONE WISH! I CAN OBLITERATE THE ENTIRE HOWLER CLAN WITH ONE WISH!

I'LL HAVE MY REVENGE AT LAST!

BUT, NO...

WHERE'S THE FUN IN THAT?

IT'S MUCH TOO EASY... MUCH TOO MERCIFUL.

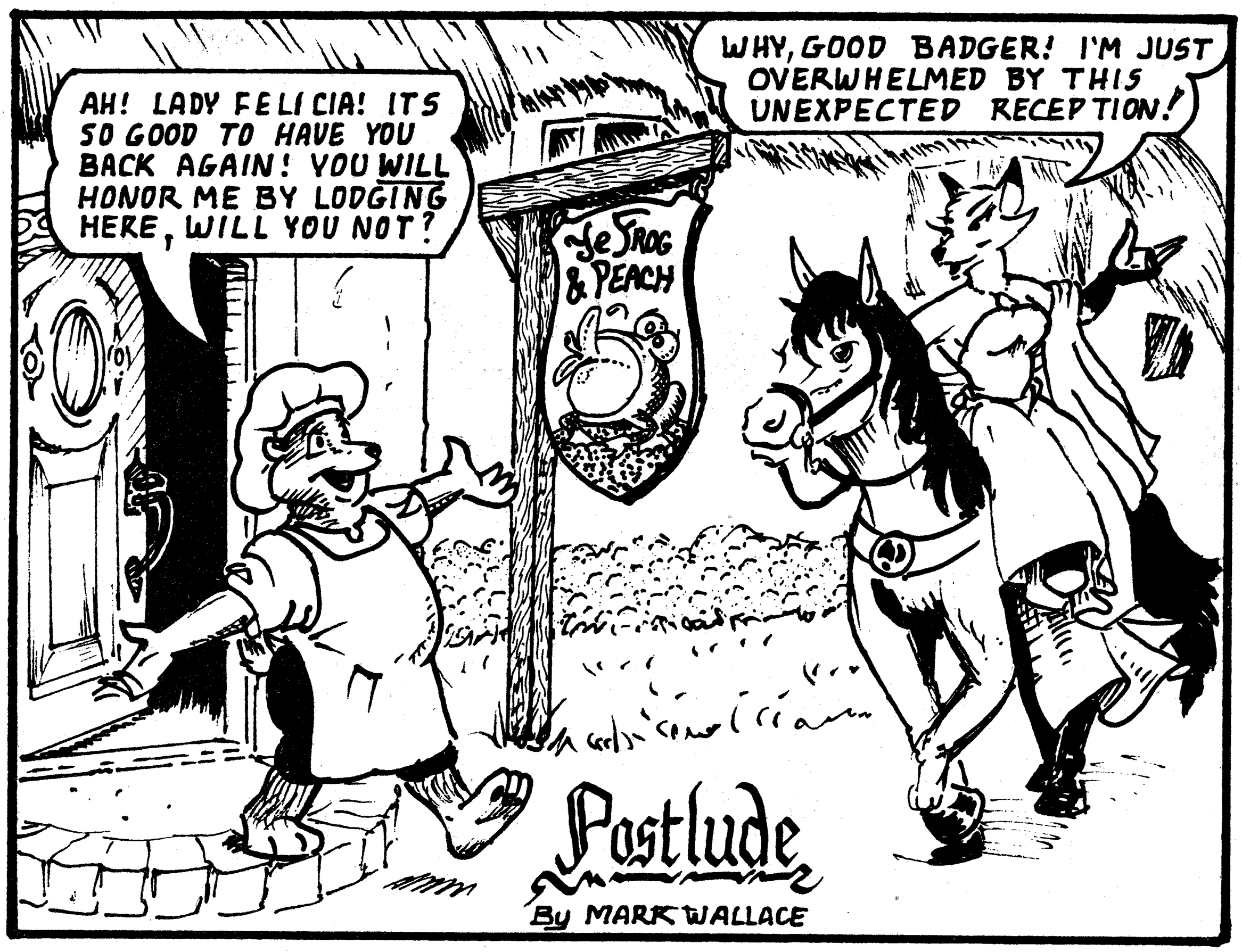
I DON'T WANT THEM ALL DEAD... I WANT THEIR SPIRITS CRUSHED, THEIR FAMILIES RUINED, THEIR EMPIRE BROKEN.

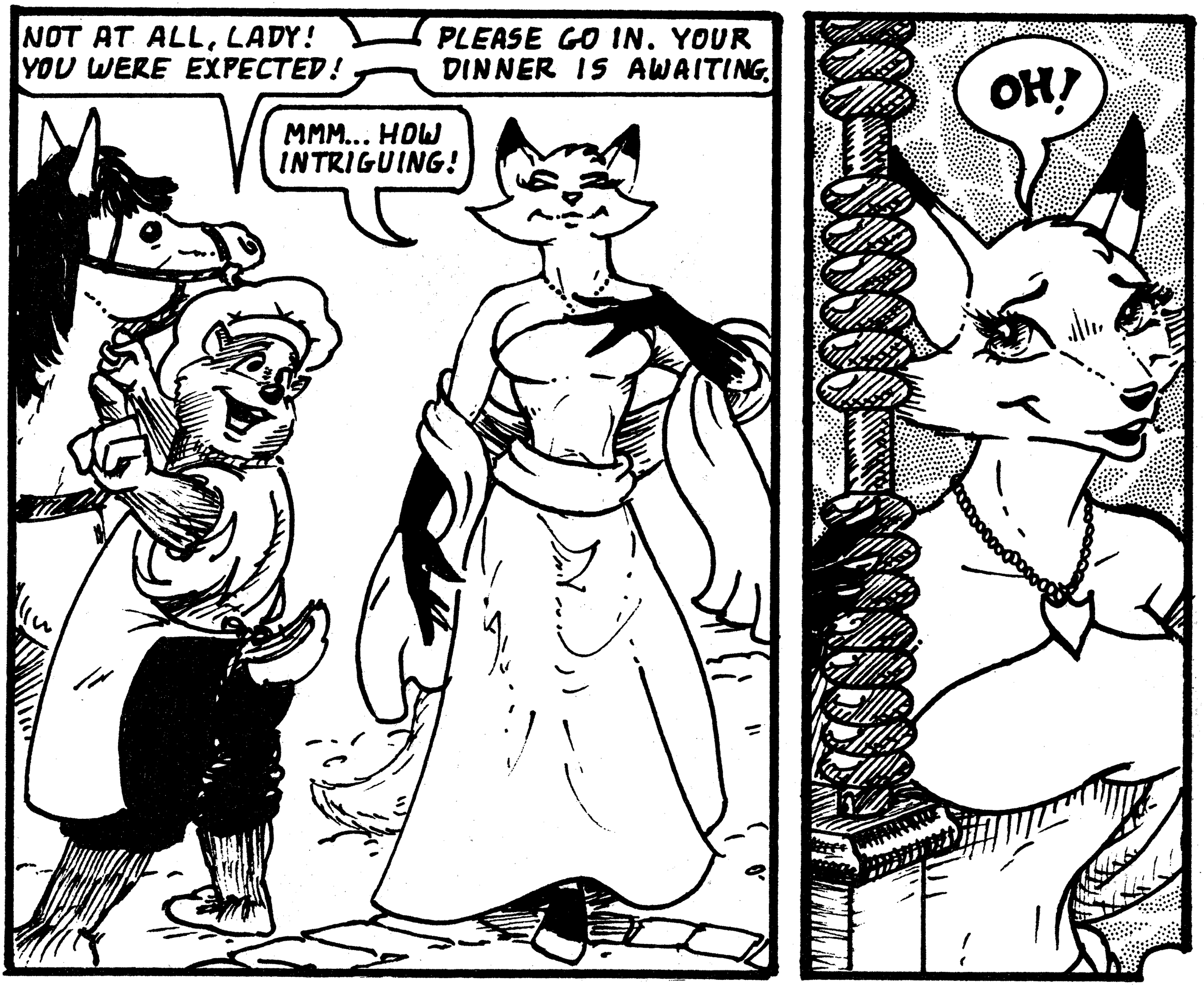
I WANT THEM TO SUFFER... FOR AS LONG AS I AM ABLE TO MAKE THEM SUFFER.

AND WHAT SHALL I DO WITH THE LAST REMAINING WISH?

FARE WELL, MELARI...
I WISH EVERY HAPPINESS
FOR YOU AND YOUR FAMILY!
MAY YOU ALL KNOW THE JOYS
THAT WERE TAKEN FROM ME!

WELL...
LET'S CHECK OUT THAT INN OVER IN THE NEXT VILLAGE.
...MAYBE THAT HANDSOME LORD BLACKFOX IS STILL LODGING THERE!


AH! LADY FELICIA! ITS SO GOOD TO HAVE YOU BACK AGAIN! YOU WILL HONOR ME BY LODGING HERE, WILL YOU NOT?
WHY, GOOD BADGER! I'M JUST OVERWHELMED BY THIS UNEXPECTED RECEPTION!
Ye Frog & Peach
Postlude
By MARK WALLACE


NOT AT ALL, LADY! YOU WERE EXPECTED!
PLEASE GO IN. YOUR DINNER IS AWAITING.
MMM... HOW INTRIGUING!
OH!

GOOD EVENING, FELICIA. WOULD YOU CARE TO DINE WITH A DECREPIT OLD FRIEND?

WHY, WILLIAM! A BARON, NOW? AND A PEER! OOH! WE DO HAVE SOME TIMES TO RETRACE!

WHAT AM I TO CALL YOU NOW, LOVE? "YOUR EXCELLENCY"? "BARON"? "MASTER"?

I SHALL.

HAVE YOU GOTTEN TALLER, WILLIAM?

YOU CAN CALL ME AN ORANGUTAN SO LONG AS YOU CALL ME MORE OFTEN!

SORTA. IT'S A LONG STORY.

YOUR NEW SITUATION HAS BEEN GOOD FOR YOU. YOU'VE NEVER FÊTED ME LIKE THIS BEFORE.

TO BE HONEST, FELICIA, I'VE BEEN SAVING AWHILE FOR THIS LITTLE SOIRÉ. I HOPE THAT MY SMALL EFFORT WILL BE ENOUGH.

HOW DID YOU KNOW I WAS COMING HERE? HAVE YOU TAKEN UP SKRYING?

LET'S JUST SAY THAT I HAVE MY SOURCES.

HAVE A COOKIE, MY DEAR?

HMMMM...

BRAZZLEBERRY!

I SEE.

WELL, I'M FAMISHED! LET'S TUCK IN.

I'LL PROVIDE DESSERT!

SOUNDS MAGICAL!

Fin

When the sorceress is hired to recover a lost family heirloom, a chain of events is set into motion that soon endangers her and her companions. Something evil stalks the countryside, always one step behind. But can even the sorceress be trusted when the prize is a wish -- any wish you want?

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